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# Let's Talk About Sex: Why the Topic of Sexual Violence Prevention Should be Prioritized in K-12 Sex Education

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**Abstract**
While campus sexual assault has recently garnered a lot of attention in the United States, there has been less recognition of individuals who experience sexual and gender-based violence outside of the university/college system. Many people who experience sexual violence have never attended a post-secondary institution, or they experienced sexual violence before they were college-aged. Because of this reality, it is important that there are resources and education about sexual violence for people at a younger age. Through an analysis of public policy, interviews with experts in the field, and a survey that I administered, this thesis examines both formal sex education in schools and informal sex education from media, porn, and other sources, to determine where and how young people are learning about sex, intimate relationships, and sexual violence. This study found that young people learned the most and the most relevant information from formal sex education in schools as well as from intimate partners. This study also found that media and porn play a role in young peoples' learning about these topics. I argue that sex education in schools is not doing an adequate job teaching about sexual violence and prevention, but that sex education could be used as a tool in sexual violence prevention efforts if there were more funding and more comprehensive curricula.

**Keywords**
sex education, sexual violence prevention, healthy relationships, pornography, intimate relationships, Political Science, Gender Culture and Society, Demie Kurz, Kurz, Demie

**Disciplines**
American Politics | Domestic and Intimate Partner Violence | Education Law | Gender and Sexuality | Health and Physical Education | Other Education | Politics and Social Change

# Let's Talk About Sex: Why the Topic of Sexual Violence Prevention Should be Prioritized in K-12 Sex Education

By

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# ABSTRACT

While campus sexual assault has recently garnered a lot of attention in the United States, there has been less recognition of individuals who experience sexual and gender-based violence outside of the university/college system. Many people who experience sexual violence have never attended a post-secondary institution, or they experienced sexual violence before they were college-aged. Because of this reality, it is important that there are resources and education about sexual violence for people at a younger age. Through an analysis of public policy, interviews with experts in the field, and a survey that I administered, this thesis examines both formal sex education in schools and informal sex education from media, porn, and other sources, to determine where and how young people are learning about sex, intimate relationships, and sexual violence. This study found that young people learned the most and the most relevant information from formal sex education in schools as well as from intimate partners. This study also found that media and porn play a role in young peoples' learning about these topics. I argue that sex education in schools is not doing an adequate job teaching about sexual violence and prevention, but that sex education could be used as a tool in sexual violence prevention efforts if there were more funding and more comprehensive curricula.

## CONTENTS

*In her public middle school sex education class in Georgia, Draupadi was handed a rose, told to take a petal off, and pass the rose to the next girl. The passing continued until there were no petals left. The girl left with the stem walked up to the front of the classroom and handed the barren flower to the teacher. The teacher stood up in front of all the girls and said, "Do you see how ugly this rose is? Every time you have sex before marriage, you give away a petal. If you have sex before marriage, you won't be able to give your husband the beautiful rose that God gave you. You will give him a petal-less rose. Do you really want to give the man you are going to spend the rest of your life with an ugly, petal-less rose?"*

*Draupadi was taught to believe that having sex meant giving a part of herself away. When she was sexually assaulted during the summer after her eighth-grade year, she felt dirty, gross, and impure. She felt like she lost a part of herself, that she had ruined herself, yet she was unable to define her experience as sexual assault. Instead, she blamed herself. It took her three years to talk about her experience with an adult. After sharing her experience with a guidance counselor in the public school system, Draupadi was told, "You need to stop victimizing yourself and acting like something bad happened to you. You were just in this encounter with some guy and you regret it so you are trying to make it seem like you didn't consent." The response that Draupadi got from this guidance counselor not only invalidated her experience but contributed to her self-blame.*

*Draupadi's abstinence-only sex education was not the cause of her sexual assault, but it led to added trauma that could have been avoided had she participated in a sex education class that handled the topics of sexual assault and relationship violence differently. It would have been life-changing for Draupadi if she had been given resources for survivors, learned that survivors*

*of sexual assault are not to blame, and if she had been taught that her self-worth was not defined by her "purity."*[1]

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the issue of campus sexual assault has garnered nationwide attention. In 2014, Barack Obama launched the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault,[2] aimed at addressing rape and sexual assault on college campuses. While there is still a lot of work to be done, there has been real progress in making college campuses safer and in educating college students and faculty about sexual violence. Thanks in large part to student activism, colleges are finally starting to change their approaches to offer better education for students and support for survivors, while lawmakers are starting to work towards policy changes. These efforts are much needed and will help so many individuals in college who could be or have already been exposed to intimate partner violence. However, for many individuals, like Draupadi, college is too late. Statistics show that individuals outside of the university system experience sexual violence at higher rates, which means that a lack of resources outside of college settings has ageist, ableist, racial, and classist implications.

Many, including former Vice President Joe Biden, have called sexual assault on college campuses an epidemic, but are largely ignoring individuals who experience sexual violence and intimate partner violence before college or who do not attend college at all. In order to ensure that individuals outside of the university system benefit from prevention efforts, education efforts, and supportive services, and to ensure that individuals do not learn about unhealthy

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[1] Abbie Starker, "Sexual Assault Education Can't Start in College," Washington Monthly, March 2, 2016. Accessed December 10, 2016. http://washingtonmonthly.com/2016/03/02/sexual-assault-education-cant-start-in-college/.
[2] "Memorandum -- Establishing a White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault," *The White House,* last modified January 22, 2014, https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/01/22/memorandum-establishing-white-house-task-force-protect-students-sexual-a

relationship behaviors before it is too late, it is crucial that activists, policymakers, and academics tackle this issue at a much younger age than college. One location that people involved in the anti-violence movement believe would be a good place for reforms is in formal sex education in schools since it is one of the most universal locations for young people across the United States. However, there are some who believe that students would better receive information from sources outside of school. Before determining how best to teach young people about healthy relationships and sexual violence, it is first important to understand the many locations in which students are learning about these topics, and which are the most relevant to students. While today young people learn to understand relationships through family, friends, media, porn, and other sources, I found through my research that the top two sources that young people reported they received the most information and the most *relevant* information about these topics are formal sex education in school and intimate partners.

In this paper, I will explore the influence of different forms sex education—including both formal sex education in schools as well as informal sex education from the popular media and porn—on young peoples' learning about intimate relationships and sexual violence. Not only will I provide insight into which sources young people use for information about these topics, but I will explore the nature of the information they get from these sources, how young people interpret those messages, and how public policy impacts which information is taught and how. Once there is a greater understanding of where young people seek out or stumble upon information about sex and relationships, and how that information impacts their knowledge and/or behavior, a more informed and targeted approach can be taken to teaching students about healthy and unhealthy relationship behavior.

Overall, I argue that while young people do indeed look to formal sex education in schools as a source of information about intimate relationships, sex education is currently not doing an adequate job addressing sexual violence and related topics. Sex education in the aggregate does not address sexual violence frequently enough, consistently enough, or with accurate enough information, and it does not do enough to counter problematic messages that student consume through media and pornography. One of the biggest reasons that sex education is failing is because of insufficient federal funding and the partisan nature of the topic, and my research will show why lawmakers must make sexual violence prevention through sex education a priority.

To show this, I will first describe the scope of the issue of sexual violence and provide definitions that will be useful in understanding the terminology used in the rest of the paper. Next, I will explain the methods I used answer the questions that this paper poses. Then, before getting into the heart of the paper, I will describe the results of the portion of my survey that asked respondents to rank which sources they got the most and most relevant information about sex and intimate relationships. Once readers understand which sources were most used by my survey respondents, they will have more context for the following sections of the paper which discuss public policy relating to sex education, the classroom experience of sex education, and the impacts of media and pornography on young people. These three sections—*Sex Education and Public Policy, Formal Sex Education in Schools,* and *Pornography and Media*—will each provide some background information as well as discuss the results of my research. Finally, I will end with a conclusion summing up the most important results of the paper as well as implications for the future.

## SEXUAL VIOLENCE: DEFINITIONS AND SCOPE

### *Defining Behaviors*

Today, there are many words to describe different types of unhealthy relationship behaviors; rape, sexual assault, relationship abuse (including physical, sexual, economic, and emotional abuse), intimate partner violence, and more. It is crucial to define these terms in the context of this paper, so that there is no confusion about meaning. It is important to note that the legal definitions of these crimes vary from state to state, and that this paper will adopt survivor-centric definitions that have been used by researchers and certain facets of the government. In other words, this paper will use definitions that are widely accepted among individuals who have experienced these offenses and advocates who work with these individuals.

1. Sexual Assault: sexual contact or behavior that occurs without explicit consent of the victim. Some forms of sexual assault include: penetration of the victim's body (rape), attempted rape, forcing a victim to perform sexual acts, such as oral sex or penetrating the perpetrator's body, fondling or unwanted sexual touching.[3]
2. Rape: In 2012, the Department of Justice updated its definition of rape, "the penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim."[4]
3. Intimate Partner Violence (i.e. Domestic Violence, Abusive Relationship): a pattern of abusive behavior that is used by an intimate partner to gain or maintain power and control over the other intimate partner. Domestic violence can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person.

[3] "Sexual Assault," RAINN, accessed December 10, 2016, https://www.rainn.org/articles/sexual-assault
[4] "An Updated Definition of Rape," Department of Justice, January 6, 2012, https://www.justice.gov/opa/blog/updated-definition-rape

This includes any behaviors that intimidate, manipulate, humiliate, isolate, frighten, terrorize, coerce, threaten, blame, hurt, injure, or wound someone.[5]

4. Consent: Consent is an affirmative decision to engage in mutually acceptable sexual activity, and is given by clear words or actions. Consent is an informed decision made freely and actively by all parties. Consent may not be inferred from silence, passivity, or lack of resistance alone. Consent to one form of sexual activity does not imply consent to other forms of sexual activity and the existence of a current or previous dating, marital, and /or sexual relationship is not sufficient to constitute consent to additional sexual activity. Consent cannot be obtained from someone who is asleep, unconscious, or otherwise mentally or physically incapacitated, whether due to alcohol, drugs, or some other condition. Consent cannot be obtained by threat, coercion, intimidation, isolation, confinement, or force. Agreement given under such conditions does not constitute consent.[6]

***Prevalence of Unhealthy Relationship Behaviors***

First of all, it is crucial to note that there are many challenges to understanding the true prevalence of unhealthy relationship behaviors. This is because many people who have experienced rape, sexual assault, or intimate partner violence do not report to the police. The Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN) notes that while sexual violence is notoriously difficult to measure, RAINN tries to use the most reliable source of statistics, which they believe is the Bureau of Justice Statistics.[7] The Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that the

[5] "Areas of Focus," Office of Violence Against Women, Department of Justice, accessed December 10, 2016, https://www.justice.gov/ovw/areas-focus
[6] "Sexual Violence," Penn Violence Prevention at the University of Pennsylvania, accessed December 10, 2016, https://secure.www.upenn.edu/vpul/pvp/sexualviolence
[7] "The Criminal Justice System: Statistics," Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network, Accessed December 16, 2016. https://www.rainn.org/statistics/criminal-justice-system.

majority (about two-thirds) of rape or sexual assault victimizations are not reported to the police, and that they must use estimates to determine the number of actual incidents.[8] Of the known sexual violence crimes not reported from 2005-2010, victims gave the following reasons for not reporting: 20% feared retaliation, 13% believed the police would not do anything to help, 13% believed it was a personal matter, 8% reported to a different official, 8% believed it was not important enough to report, 7% did not want to get the perpetrator in trouble, 2% believed the police could not do anything to help, 30% gave another reason, or did not cite one reason.[9] Additionally—while very few victims reported to the police—only 23 percent of rape or sexual assault victims received help or advice from a victims service agency.[10] Furthermore, there is little known about the reporting of types of intimate partner violence that are not physical and sexual. For example, there is little known about the prevalence and reporting of economic and emotional abuse, which can be incredibly harmful to a persons' health as well.[11]

That being said, there are some commonly cited statistics about rape, sexual assault, and intimate partner violence. About 1 in 6 American women has been the victim of attempted or completed rape in her lifetime and about 1 in 33 men have been the victim of attempted or completed rape in their lifetime. Transgender, Native American, and incarcerated individuals are some of the most at-risk for experiencing attempted or completed rape.[12] The majority of sexual violence incidents (78 percent) were perpetrated by a family member, intimate partner, friend, or acquaintance.[13] An estimated 13 percent of women and 6 percent of men have experienced

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[8] Michael Planty and Lynn Langton, *Female victims of sexual violence, 1994-2010*, Washington, DC: U.S. Dept. of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2013, 6
[9] Michael Planty and Lynn Langton. *Female victims of sexual violence, 1994-2010*, 16
[10] Michael Planty and Lynn Langton. *Female victims of sexual violence, 1994-2010*, 1
[11] Tina de Benedictis, Jaelline Jaffe, and Jeanne Segal, "Domestic Violence and Abuse: Types, Signs, Symptoms, Causes, and Effects," accessed December 16, 2016, http://www.aaets.org/article144.htm
[12] "Victims of Sexual Violence: Statistics ." Accessed December 16, 2016. https://www.rainn.org/statistics/victims-sexual-violence.
[13] Michael Planty and Lynn Langton. *Female victims of sexual violence, 1994-2010*, 1

sexual coercion in their lifetime (i.e., unwanted sexual penetration after being pressured in a nonphysical way) and about 48 percent of women and men in the United States have experienced psychological aggression by an intimate partner in their lifetime.[14]

The reason that it is so important to focus anti-violence efforts not just on college campuses is because while 23.1% of female and 5.4% of male undergraduate students experience rape or sexual assault during their time in college,[15] college-aged women who are *not* students are 20% more likely than students of the same age to be a victim of rape or sexual assault.[16] Furthermore, 40.4% of victims of sexual violence, stalking, and intimate partner violence were first victimized before the age of 18.[17] This means that not only do many individuals experience sexual violence and intimate partner violence before college, but that those who don't attend a post-secondary institution are more likely to experience victimization. This is particularly troubling considering that in 2015, Hispanic students, Black students, and students with disabilities were the least likely to attend college,[18] and that students who grew up in a low-income household are less likely to attend college than their middle to high income

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[14] Michelle C. Black, Kathleen C. Basile, Matthew K. Breiding, Sharon G. Smith, et al., *National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010 Summary Report*, Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2013, 2

[15] David Cantor, Bonnie Fisher, Susan Chibnall, Reanna Townsend, et. Al, "Report on the AAU Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct", *Association of American Universities (AAU),* September 21, 2015,http://www.aau.edu/uploadedFiles/AAU_Publications/AAU_Reports/Sexual_Assault_Campus_Survey/AAU_Campus_Climate_Survey_12_14_15.pdf

[16] Sofi Sinozich and Lynn Langton, "Rape and Sexual Victimization Among College-Aged Females, 1995-2013," *Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics,* December 2014, https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/rsavcaf9513.pdf

[17] Matthew J. Breiding, Sharon G. Smith, Kathleen C. Basile, et. Al, "Prevalence and Characteristics of Sexual Violence, Stalking, and Intimate Partner Violence Victimization — National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, United States, 2011," *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,* September 2014, http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss6308a1.htm?s_cid=ss6308a1_e

[18] Camille L. Ryan and Kurt Bauman, "Educational Attainment in the United States: 2015," *U.S Census Bureau,* March 2016, http://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2016/demo/p20-578.pdf

counterparts.[19] This means that focusing solely on college campus sexual assault not only has ageist and gendered implications, but racial and classist implications as well.

There is a small amount of information known about the experiences of high-school-aged youth with sexual violence and relationship abuse. The Office for Adolescent Health released the results of a 2015 survey that indicated that 12 percent of females and 7 percent of males in grades 9-12 reported that in the previous year, they experienced dating violence, which includes being hit, slammed into something, or injured with an object or weapon on purpose by someone they were dating or going out with. Additionally, 10 percent of females and 3 percent of males reported that in the previous year they experienced sexual dating violence, including kissing, touching or being physically forced to have sexual intercourse (when they did not want to) by someone they were dating or going out with. Furthermore, 10 percent of females and 3 percent of males reported that they were at some point physically forced to have sexual intercourse when they did not want to.[20] Unfortunately, there is not much known about emotional abuse experienced by teens. Additionally, these statistics are researched and reported using a gender binary that does not account for trans or gender-non-conforming students.

***The Public Religion Research Institute's Statistics on Sexual Violence***

There are additional statistics that came from a survey by the Public Religion Research Institution (PRRI), and the results from this survey will be cited in later sections of this thesis. PRRI found that 15% of millennials had personally been sexually assaulted, and 34% reported that this had happened to a close friend or family member. Among men, only 3% reported being a survivor themselves, yet 25% say a close friend or family member has experienced sexual

[19] "Immediate College Enrollment Rate," The Condition of Education, May 2016, accessed December 16, 2016, http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cpa.asp

[20] "United States Adolescent Healthy Relationships Facts," The Office of Adolescent Health, accessed December 16, 2016, https://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/adolescent-health-topics/healthy-relationships/fact-sheets/us.html

assault. More black women (19%) reported experiencing sexual assault themselves, which is more than white and Hispanic women, but Asian-Pacific Islander women reported much lower levels of being victims themselves at 5%.

Though peoples' individual experiences with sexual assault varied in the PRRI survey, all millennials saw sexual assault as a problem to some degree in schools and workplaces. It is no surprise that millennials saw this issue on college campuses, but a slim majority (53%) of millennials said that this is also a common issue in high schools. Forty-four percent of millennials said that sexual assault in high school is somewhat or very rare. However, these numbers could be skewed by the fact that many instances of sexual assault probably do not happen on high school grounds, or that these respondents were just not aware of it when they were that young. There were some racial divides in the perceived prevalence of sexual assault as an issue in middle and high school. Black women were the most likely to say that they perceived sexual assault as a prevalent problem in middle and high school, with 50% saying it was prevalent in middle school and 70% saying the same about high school. Forty-one percent of millennials said that high schools are doing enough to address the sexual assault issue, and 53% disagreed. There is a gender gap in this response, with millennial women being more likely to say that schools are not doing enough to address the issue, which is not surprising.

Sexual harassment was perceived as a more common problem than sexual assault in most cases. The majority (52%) of millennials said that sexual harassment is common in middle schools, and 75% said it was somewhat or very common in high schools. There were far fewer

racial and religious divides in the responses to this question, showing that sexual harassment is likely a universal issue in middle schools and high schools.[21]

***Results About the Prevalence of Sexual Violence from My Survey on Sex Education and Intimate Relationships***

I was also able to collect data about the pervasiveness of sexual violence in the survey that I administered. This data can be found in Table 1 in Appendix B. I expected that many of my survey respondents would have experienced sexual violence themselves, but I did not expect that the results of my survey would portray the problem of sexual violence as more severe than the PRRI survey and some government and RAINN statistics. However, statistics about sexual violence from my survey showed a higher prevalence of sexual violence than previous research on the topic.

I asked respondents about their experiences with intimate relationships and sexual violence to try and understand if there is a link between a person's sex education and their experience with intimate relationships. Overall, my survey found that 43.14% of women had experienced sexual violence and that multiracial and non-heterosexual individuals were some of the most likely to experience sexual violence. In terms of reporting incidents of sexual violence, my survey found a smaller percentage of individuals that reported their experience with sexual violence to an authority than found in the Department of Justice study. I also found a correlation between individuals feeling like they had less power in a relationship, being coerced into sexual activity, and having experienced sexual violence, which I predicted prior to administering the survey. These findings will be explored more in depth below.

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[21] Daniel Cox and Robert P. Jones, *How Race and Religion Shape Millennial Attitudes on Sexuality and Reproductive Health,* report, Public Religion Research Institute, March 27, 2015, accessed February 24, 2017, http://www.prri.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/PRRI-Millennials-Web-FINAL-1.pdf

Almost three quarters (71.94%) of respondents in my survey indicated that they have been in an intimate relationship (defined as an interpersonal relationship that involves physical and/or emotional intimacy) before. Of the individuals who have been in an intimate relationship before, almost all (96%) said that an intimate relationship of theirs involved some form of sexual activity. Before asking respondents whether they had personally experienced sexual violence, it was important to ask questions about power dynamics and coercion in intimate relationships, since many individuals might not describe coercion or a lack of power in a relationship as violent or abusive. To try and gain some insight into the dynamics of respondents' experiences in intimate relationships without explicitly asking about sexual violence, I asked respondents whether they had ever felt like they had more or less power and/or control in an intimate relationship as well as if they had ever experienced coercion in an intimate relationship.

When asked whether they had ever felt like they had less power and/or control in an intimate relationship, 39% of respondents said yes, and 3% were unsure. When asked whether they had ever felt like they had more power and/or control in an intimate relationship, 26% said yes and 6% were unsure. Most of the time, those who have experienced having either less or more power and/or control have only experienced that phenomenon. Only 7.91% of respondents had experienced both phenomena.

Over a quarter (28.78%) of my survey respondents indicated that they had felt coerced into having sexual intercourse or participating in other sexual activities at some point in their life. This is a substantially larger percentage of individuals who have been coerced than reported by the CDC, which said that 13% of women had experienced coercion.[22] Of the individuals who

[22] Matthew J. Breiding, Sharon G. Smith, Kathleen C. Basile, et. Al, "Prevalence and Characteristics of Sexual Violence, Stalking, and Intimate Partner Violence Victimization — National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, United States, 2011."

said they had felt coerced, 70.27% also indicated that they had felt like they had less power in a relationship, showing a correlation between coercion and lack of power.

When respondents were asked, "have you personally experienced rape, sexual assault, stalking, and/or relationship abuse (including sexual abuse, physical abuse, economic abuse, and/or emotional abuse)?" almost a third (29.5%) of respondents said yes, 69.06% said no, and 1.44% said they did not feel comfortable answering this question (see Table 1). Almost three quarters (70.73%) of individuals who said they had experienced one of these forms of sexual violence were women, and 24.39% were men. While the PRRI survey found that 15% of women and 3% had been sexually assaulted, this survey found that 41.43% of women and 15.15% of men had experienced sexual violence. The only transgender individual to complete this survey had also experienced violence, though others who identified as gender queer, nonbinary, agender/neutrois, and gender fluid had not. The PRRI survey did not account for individuals who identified outside of the gender binary.

Half of the respondents who did not identify as heterosexual indicated that they had experienced some type of sexual violence, while 26.05% of heterosexual individuals said they experienced violence, showing that non-heterosexual people are more likely to have experienced violence. Multiracial respondents were the most likely of any other racial group to experience sexual violence, with 50% of them indicating that they had experienced sexual violence. Comparatively, 35.63% of white individuals, 30% of Hispanic individuals, 19.05% of Black or African American individuals, and 16.67% of Asian individuals indicated that they had experienced sexual violence. There was slight variance across educational attainment levels, as those who were currently or previously enrolled in a post-secondary institution were slightly more likely to have experienced violence, though this difference was not significant. Among all

of the survey respondents, 75.61% of individuals who indicated they had experienced some form of sexual violence said that they experienced it before the age of 18, and many of those were also individuals who indicated that they currently or previously attended a post-secondary school. This shows that even though a slightly higher percentage of individuals in a post-secondary school had experienced violence, many of those individuals experienced it prior to attending that school, proving that sexual violence is occurring outside of the college and university system.

Not all of the individuals who said they had felt coerced into having sexual intercourse or participating in other sexual activities indicated that they had experienced rape, sexual assault, stalking, and/or relationship abuse, potentially because though they felt coerced, they did not proceed to comply. However, 60% of the respondents who did say that they had felt coerced also indicated that they experienced some form of sexual violence. Additionally, 59.46% of those who said they had experienced some form of sexual violence had also indicated that they felt like they had less power in an intimate relationship. This shows both a correlation between having less power in a relationship, coercion, and experiencing sexual violence. This correlation is not surprising, but is nevertheless important to reiterate.

The findings of my survey vary slightly from that of the Department of Justice in terms of reporting. While the Department of Justice found that about two-thirds of individuals who experience sexual violence did not report, my survey found that almost three-quarters of survivors did not report. Of the 41 respondents who experienced sexual violence, 24.39% reported this incident to the police or another authority, and 73.17% did not. Respondents were able to explain why they did or did not report, and these responses can be found in Table 2. Some reasons why individuals did not report the experience to an authority were because they did not feel it was severe enough, they did not feel threatened in the long term, they were not

aware that what they experienced was violence/abuse, they felt ashamed and/or stigmatized, or they did not think there was anything the authorities could do. Some of the individuals who did report to an authority claimed that they did so because a parent or counselor encouraged or forced them to. One respondent said that the authorities treated them like a liar. Overall, it seems like experiences with and perceptions of the authorities are not positive among this sample.

My survey also found a larger number of individuals who knew someone who had experienced sexual violence than the PRRI survey. When asked if someone they know has experienced rape, sexual assault, stalking, and/or relationship abuse, over half (51.8%) of respondents said yes, though 11.51% were unsure. Comparatively, only 34% of women and 25% of men in the PRRI survey indicated that they knew someone who had experienced sexual violence.

Though there are barriers to knowing the full extent to which unhealthy relationship behaviors are occurring, it is clear that some of the most violent of these behaviors—rape and sexual assault— are occurring at extremely high rates. This also means that it is likely that some of the less harmful behaviors—behaviors that are verbal and visual rather than physical—are occurring at an even higher rate, since these less harmful behaviors tend to happen with greater frequency.[23] It is also clear that individuals with marginalized identities – women, non-cis, non-heterosexual, and multiracial individuals – are some of the most likely to experience sexual violence.

[23] "Who Are You?: Being an Active Bystander," (presentation, University of Pennsylvania, Penn Anti-Violence Educators, Philadelphia, PA, 2016).

## METHODS

In order to measure the impact of different forms of sex education (both formal and informal), it was crucial to take a multi-method approach, since there are many gaps in existing knowledge on this subject. This study used an analysis of state and federal policies, interviews, and survey data to provide a fuller picture of how and where young people are learning about intimate relationships, rape, sexual assault, and relationship abuse.

Because state and federal laws influence what is taught in sex education classes in schools, particularly when it comes to topics related to sexual assault, rape, and relationship abusive, this study examined federal policies that discuss teaching healthy relationships in school. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is the only piece of federal legislation that mentions teaching about healthy relationships in K-12 school, and each state is required to come up with a plan for how to implement ESSA. Unfortunately, most states have not yet released their state plan for ESSA, so it was not possible to determine which states are prioritizing sexual assault prevention based on state plans. However, it is important to analyze the rhetoric of ESSA, and particularly the section dealing with sex education, because it serves as a guide for states and local agencies and its level of vagueness and therefore interpretability can help predict what might happen on a state and local level. Additionally, while there are too few state plans available to make any definitive conclusions about how they will implement ESSA, there have been several laws introduced on the state level regarding sex education, and their success can help predict whether states will choose to prioritize sexual violence prevention and use the funding from ESSA for programs about healthy relationships and consent. Another limitation of this method is that regardless of federal and state law, much discretion is left up to local

agencies, so ESSA and the individual state laws cannot fully explain what is happening within schools.

To fill in some of the gaps in knowledge that state policies cannot shed light on, interviews were conducted with some prominent sex educators and experts in the field, who could speak to what is happening in schools, classrooms, and elsewhere regarding young peoples' sex education. The experts that were interviewed are Al Vernacchio, a sex educator at Friends Central High School in Wynwood, Pennsylvania; Jonathan Zimmerman, a professor in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania and author of *Too Hot to Handle: A Global History of Sex Education*; Nina Hartley, a pornography actress and sex educator; Nanci Coppola, the CEO of a risk-avoidance (or abstinence-only) program called Program Reach; Shelagh Johnson, the Youth Sexual Health Coordinator for the Public Health Division of the Oregon Public Health Authority; and Laurie Betito, a clinical psychologist who specializes in sexuality. The interviewees were chosen based on availability as well as diversity of perspective. It was important to learn from academics, advocates, and educators to gain a fuller understanding of sex education in the United States. The interviews were informal, and attempted to understand each individual's perspective on where young people learn about sex, and how they think young people could best learn about healthy relationship behavior. The interviews also helped to provide a fuller picture of the external factors, like government and media, that impact young peoples' sex education.

Finally, it was crucial that in addition to interviews with experts, the perspective of young people be considered. One survey titled, "How Race and Religion Shape Millennial Attitudes on Sexuality and Reproductive Health" from the Public Religion Research Institution is one of the few existing surveys that asks young people specifically the value of their sex education as well

as their perceptions of sexual violence. While this survey does not explicitly make the connection between sexual violence prevention and sex education, it was possible to analyze patterns in this data. Additionally, this survey does not include information about the variety of other locations that young people might be learning about sex and relationships, like porn, media, family, and friends. This survey was useful in understanding millennials' opinions about sex education, and how common they believe the issues of sexual assault and sexual harassment are in middle schools and high schools, which is a focus of this paper.

To fill in the gaps in existing research, to examine sources of information outside of school-based sex education, and to make the explicit connection between sexual violence and sex education, a survey was administered to a random sample of 139 participants ages 18-24 using Qualtrics. The survey had five main parts. The first section asked demographic questions, which were used to help understand how things like gender, race, sexuality, educational attainment, and school-type influenced respondents' answers, if at all. Next, there was a brief section that asked fact-based questions about rape, sexual assault, abusive relationships, and healthy relationships, so that participants' knowledge of these topics could be objectively assessed. This is important because if participants responded to the survey indicating that they learned about these topics in school or elsewhere but got these questions wrong, it could shed some light on the quality of information they were provided with in their formal and/or informal sex education. The third section asked specific questions about the content and instruction of their formal sex education in high school. The fourth section asked questions about respondents' porn usage, and whether or not their porn usage has an influence on their perceptions of sex and relationships. Finally, the last section connects the idea of sex education to personal experiences with sexual violence and/or abuse, by asking if respondents have experienced or know someone who has experienced

violence or abuse. This section asks whether their sex education was helpful in understanding and/or coping with these experiences. Additionally, the survey asks respondents to rank where they learned the most and the most relevant information about sex and relationships. Most of the survey questions were multiple choice questions, though there was room to elaborate for some of the questions so that a more qualitative analysis could be made as well. Respondents were explicitly given the choice to share any other relevant information or personal anecdotes related to the topics in the survey, and many did leave responses. These responses can be found in Table 7, and the entire survey transcript can be found in Appendix D.

The 18-24 age range was chosen because these individuals would have graduated from high school more recently, and would be more likely to remember their sex education class. The 18-24 age range was also chosen because individuals ages 18-24 are also considered "college-aged" by the Department of Justice.[24] Additionally, they will have had some of the most recent versions of sex education curriculum, compared to their older counterparts. Ideally, it would have been beneficial to survey students still in high school, but because of time restrictions it was not possible to survey this population. Of the surveyed population, 70 identified as a woman, 66 identified as a man, one identified as transgender, one identified as genderqueer, two identified as nonbinary, one identified as agender/neutrois, and two identified as gender fluid. Respondents were allowed to identify as more than one gender. An overwhelming majority (85.61%) of respondents identified as heterosexual, and 2.88% identified as gay, 2.16% identified as lesbian, 6.47% identified as bisexual, 2.88% identified as pansexual, and under 1% of respondents identified as either asexual or queer. Again, respondents were able to select more than one label to explain their sexuality.

[24] Sofi Sinozich and Lynn Langton, "Rape and Sexual Victimization Among College-Aged Females, 1995-2013."

The racial breakdown of the survey respondents was fairly consistent with national demographics. The majority of respondents identified as white (62.5%), while 15.11% of respondents identified as Black or African American, 15.83% identified as Hispanic or Latinx, 8.63% identified as Asian, 2.16% identified as American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, or other Pacific Islander, and 4.32% identified as multiracial. Geographically, there was some diversity in which states individuals grew up in, though Alaska, Connecticut, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Dakota, South Carolina, South Dakota, Vermont, and Wyoming were not represented. While this is a large number of states not represented, there was definitely some regional diversity in the states that were represented. It should be noted that the largest numbers of respondents came from California (15.83%) and Texas (10.07%), but these numbers are somewhat consistent with the percent of the U.S. population that these states make up (about 12% of the U.S. population lives in California and a little over 8% lives in Texas).

Most of the survey respondents attended a public middle school (85.61%) and/or a public high school (83.45%). Of the rest of the respondents, 5.76% and 7.19% attended a private middle school or high school, 2.16% attended a magnet school for middle and/or high school, 2.88% and 2.16% attended a religiously affiliated middle and/or high school, under one percent attended a charter school for middle and/or high school, one respondent went to a DoDEA (Department of Defense Education Activity) for middle school, and 2 respondents were homeschooled for middle school while 4 were homeschooled in high school. Five respondents wrote that they attended a Christian school at some point in their life, four attended a catholic school, two attended a Seventh Day Adventist school, two attended a Jewish school, and one attended a Lutheran school.

In terms of post-secondary education, 71.22% of respondents said that they were currently (39.57%) or previously (31.65%) enrolled in a post-secondary institution, defined as colleges, universities, community colleges, junior colleges, and technical/vocational/proprietary schools. Of the 31.65% who said they were previously enrolled, many appear to have graduated, but some indicated a graduation date very far into the future (as there was no option for them to say they did not graduate) which may imply that for some reason they did not graduate from this post-secondary institution. This was a flaw in the survey. Finally, 28.78% of respondents said they had never been enrolled in a post-secondary institution. Asian respondents and Hispanic/Latinx respondents were the least likely to never have been enrolled in a post-secondary institution.

## WHERE DO YOUNG PEOPLE LEARN ABOUT INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS?

The most crucial question that I sought to answer via this study was "where do young people learn about intimate relationships." I felt that answering this question was very important, because without knowing where young people seek information, it would be difficult for violence-prevention advocates to provide education and resources that would be relevant and accessible to the target population. While my survey is not definitive and only speaks to a sample of 139 individuals, the results as they pertain to this question were slightly surprising, but validated my original theory. Before beginning my study, I believed that formal sex education was a main source of information for students about sex and intimate relationships, and that it had an impact on individuals' knowledge and perceptions of sexual violence. However, many of the experts I spoke with—whose opinions will be outlined in later sections of this paper—believed that the number one source of information for students would be media. Ultimately, my survey found that sex education and intimate partners were the number one sources for information for young people about sex and intimate relationships. While it is not surprising to me that intimate partners were a top source, I did not predict this from the outset.

Respondents were asked to rank where they learned the most and the most relevant information about intimate relationships. The options (in the order they were listed on the survey) were formal sex education in school, porn, movies, internet searches (excluding porn), magazines, parent(s), sibling(s), friend(s), intimate partner(s), and other. When respondents were asked where they learned the *most* information about intimate relationships, formal sex education in school and intimate partners were listed most frequently, with 20.88% of respondents saying formal sex education in school and 20.14% of respondents saying intimate partners. Parents were ranked as the number one source of information by 16.55% of respondents, followed by internet

searches (excluding pornography) and porn at 10.07%. Of course, with ten options, it's hard to make any definitive statements about where these 18-24 year olds got most of their information, so looking at what percentage of people ranked each source in their top three was useful. Formal sex education was ranked in the top three by the most amount of people (47.48%), followed by friend(s) at 45.33%, intimate partner(s) at 44.96%, parent(s) at 42.45%, and internet searches (excluding porn) at 40.28%.

When asked where respondents got the *most relevant* information about intimate relationships, intimate partner(s) and formal sex education in schools were listed most frequently again, but this time intimate partner(s) was listed more frequently (28.06%) than formal sex education in schools (23.02%). Parents were ranked as the next most relevant source of information, with 15.11% of respondents ranking them first, followed by movies and internet searches (excluding porn) at 7.91%. Only 6.47% of respondents ranked porn as the number one source for relevant information. Looking at the percentages of respondents that ranked each source in their top three, formal sex education in school was most frequently ranked in the top three at 52.51%, followed by intimate partner(s) at 51.82%, parents at 36.69%, movies at 35.97%, and porn at 34.53%. This means that over one-third of respondents ranked porn as one of the top three sources for relevant information about intimate relationships. However, it is clear that the sources where the young people who responded to this survey receive the *most* and the *most relevant* information are sex education in schools and their intimate partner(s). While friends were listed in the top three for the most information, they were not frequently ranked in the top three for most *relevant* sources.

These results are different than the results expected by most of the experts. Firstly, none of the experts predicted that intimate partners would be a top source for information for young

people. The fact that many young people go to their intimate partners for information begs the question of where their partners are getting the information. This question has not been explicitly answered, but it is likely that many of those partners get information from sex education in school, since that was the other most frequently listed source for information. Additionally, many of the experts would not have expected sex education to be listed as frequently as it was, which further emphasizes the importance of the content of sex education in schools. It is, however, important to note that there may be some response bias in respondents choosing sex education as one of their main sources, because it was listed first and because a large portion of the rest of the survey was about sex education, meaning that it was primed in the respondent's minds. However, it is clear that all of the respondents thought about their rankings and rearranged the other sources significantly, so they absolutely could have ranked formal sex education lower. This outcome—of respondents indicating that they learned a lot of information and a lot of relevant information from their sex education—is consistent with the findings of the Public Religion Research Institute's survey, which showed that millennials trust that their sex education is accurate.[25] While a question about trust was not explicitly asked in my survey, it is likely that individuals who say they learned a lot of information and a lot of relevant information from their sex education trusted the information they received (especially since there was not a significant difference in the percentage of people who ranked it as relevant versus providing the most information). This does not mean that the sex education in schools *is* accurate, but it means that many of the respondents probably perceived it to be.

[25] Daniel Cox and Robert P. Jones, *How Race and Religion Shape Millennial Attitudes on Sexuality and Reproductive Health*.

## SEX EDUCATION AND PUBLIC POLICY

Since it is clear that sex education has an influence on young people in some way, it is important to examine it more closely. But before delving into curriculum and classroom dynamics, it will be useful to look at public policy surrounding sex education, because decisions made on a policy level heavily influence what gets taught in the classroom.

### *What Type of Sex Education Has Been Funded and How?*

Because it is tough for a program to exist without funding, it is important to understand the financial context in which these sex education programs exist. Which types are programs get funding and why? Answering this question is important in understanding the aims of the government in teaching formal sex education.

Concerns about sex education rose in the late 1970s and 1980s as concerns about teen pregnancy and HIV/AIDS in the United States rose. States began to increasingly pass policies requiring HIV/AIDS education, sometimes—but not always—in conjunction with broader sex education. At this time, funding for STI-prevention education, teen pregnancy prevention, and HIV/AIDS was housed in separate funding streams, and the government never directly provided funding for comprehensive sex education programs.[26] In the 1980s, during the Reagan administration, conservative policymakers started funding abstinence-only-until-marriage programs, and funding for these programs increased exponentially from 1996-2009, largely during the George W. Bush administration. However, as funding for abstinence-only programs increased, more and more evidence arose suggesting that abstinence-only education was ineffective in preventing teen pregnancy and delaying sexual activity, which were two of its

[26] "A Brief History of Federal Funding for Sex Education and Related Programs," SIECUS, http://www.siecus.org/document/docWindow.cfm?fuseaction=document.viewDocument&documentid=69&documentFormatId=69

main goals.[27] Even though it has been largely proven ineffective in these areas, Congress has funneled over one-and-a-half billion dollars in to abstinence-only-until-marriage programs to date.[28]

In fiscal years 2010 and 2011, the Obama administration eliminated two thirds of the federal funding for ineffective abstinence-only programs, and allocated $190 million in funding for two new sex education initiatives to support both evidence-based programs and innovative approaches to prevent unintended teen pregnancy and STDs, including HIV. Obama also created the new Office of Adolescent Health. While President Obama's reforms were a step in the right direction, the largest source of funding that came from these reforms was for the President's Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative (TPPI), which naturally focused very narrowly on teen pregnancy prevention, and missed the opportunity to provide funding and resources to programs that have a holistic, comprehensive curriculum with an emphasis on healthy behaviors and healthy relationships.[29] Furthermore, the rhetoric surrounding teenage pregnancy assumes that teenage pregnancy results in devastation for both the mother and the child, which is not always the case.[30]

Another source of federal funding for sex education outside of TPPI came with the signing of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act in March of 2010. The legislation created the Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP), which totaled $75 million in mandatory funding from 2010-2014 for sex education programs that teach about "both

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[27] Christopher Trenholm, Barbara Devaney, Ken Fortson, et. Al, "Impacts of Four Title V, Section 510 Abstinence Education Programs," *Mathematica Policy Research, Inc*., April 2007, https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/74961/report.pdf

[28] "A Brief History of Federal Funding for Sex Education and Related Programs," SIECUS.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Michelle Fine, "Sexuality, Schooling, and Adolescent Females: The Missing Discourse of Desire," *Harvard Educational Review* 58, no. 1 (1988): 29-54. doi:10.17763/haer.58.1.u0468k1v2n2n8242.
37

abstinence and contraception for the prevention of pregnancy and [STIs], including HIV/AIDS."[31] Furthermore, PREP-funded programs were required to address at least three of the five subjects deemed "adult preparation subjects": healthy relationships, adolescent development, financial literacy, educational and career success, and healthy life skills.[32] This was the first time that government funding came with any type of requirement to teach about healthy relationships, though the requirement does not ensure that *every* PREP-funded program teach about healthy relationships, dating, romantic relationships, and self-esteem. Like the other programs mentioned, PREP is still largely focused on preventing teenage pregnancy and HIV/AIDS. One other source of funding for sex education aside from TPPI and PREP is through the Center for Disease Control's Division of Adolescent and School Health (DASH), which focuses primarily on HIV/AIDS prevention as well.

Overall, the funding for sex education since the 1980s has been either for Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage-Education (AOUME) or for Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE), which is generally only funded if it is proven to lead to measurable outcomes like the delay of sex and the reduction of pregnancy and STIs.[33] Many scholars have critiqued the priority of outcome-driven sex education, saying that an emphasis on science, evidence, and public health prevents students from learning some extremely important skills for dealing with the sexualized rape culture we live in. Some of these critiques will be outlined in a later section. Now, we will take a look at the most recent piece of federal legislation dealing with sex education.

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[31] "A Brief History of Federal Funding for Sex Education and Related Programs," SIECUS.
[32] "State Personal Responsibility Education Program Fact Sheet," *Family Youth and Services Bureau,* June 2016, http://www.acf.hhs.gov/fysb/resource/prep-fact-sheet
[33] Sharon Lamb, *Sex Ed for Caring Schools: Creating an Ethics-based Curriculum*, New York: Teachers College Press, 2013.

***The Every Student Succeeds Act***

On the federal level, the only piece of legislation that discusses sex education is the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which amended the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 in December 2015.[34] Tim Kaine, a democratic senator from Virginia, helped ensure the inclusion of certain provisions of his Teach Safe Relationships Act, which allows the use of Title IV funding specifically for educating students about safe relationship behavior to prevent sexual assault and dating violence.[35] The act itself does not mandate that schools teach about healthy relationships, but creates slightly more incentive for schools to do so. There is a section in ESSA titled "Title IV—21st Century Schools," that allocates federal funding for a number of programs. Couched in this section, among many programs that qualify for funding under Title IV that deal with bringing technology into the classroom, substance use prevention, and more, are some programs that directly or indirectly could deal with sexual violence prevention and sex education. This is the only section of ESSA that deals with sex education and sexual violence prevention, and the relevant portions of this section will be outlined in detail below.

In Subpart 1—Student Support and Academic Enrichment Programs, section 4102, the term "drug and violence prevention" is defined with respect to violence as, "promotion of school safety, such that students and school personnel are free from violent and disruptive acts, including sexual harassment and abuse, and victimization associated with prejudice and intolerance, on school premises, going to and from school, and at school-sponsored activities,

[34] *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 As Amended Through P.L. 114-95,* Enacted December 10, 2015, P.L. 114-95, 114th Congress.
[35] "Key Provisions of Kaine's Teach Safe Relationships Act & CTE Bills Included in Final Education Bill," Tim Kaine, last modified November 30, 2015, accessed February 1, 2017, http://www.kaine.senate.gov/press-releases/key-provisions-of-kaines-teach-safe-relationships-act-and-cte-bills-included-in-final-education-bill

through the creation and maintenance of a school environment that is free of weapons and fosters individual responsibility and respect for the rights of others."[36] Here, sexual harassment and abuse are specifically referenced as being a part of violence prevention in addition to prejudice and intolerance, which is important to note because in later sections of this bill, the nebulous term "violence prevention" is used quite often. It should also be noted that the definition of violence pertains only to incidents on school grounds, at school-sponsored events, or in transit to and from school.

Section 4103 explains that each state must submit a state plan in order to receive funding. Each state plan must include a description of how the state education agency will use the funds, a description of how the state will ensure that the money reaches local agencies, an assurance that the state has reviewed existing resources and will coordinate with existing programs, an assurance that the state will monitor the implementation of programs that use this funding, and an assurance that there will be equitable access for all students to the programs funded by this money.

Sections 4104—State Use of Funds; 4105—Allocations to Local Educational Agencies; and 4106—Local Educational Agency Applications each explain the logistics of where the money from Section 4103 must go, and how local agencies can apply for it. Each of these sections references sections 4107 and 4108, which each detail the types of programs and activities that can use the funding. Section 4107—Activities to Support Well-Rounded Educational Opportunities focuses on programs that have to do with things like college and career, financial literacy, STEM, foreign language instruction, environmental education, music

[36] *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 As Amended Through P.L. 114-95,* p 216

and arts programs, and more. The next section, section 4108, is the section that outlines activities related to sex education and sexual violence prevention, among other activities.

Section 4108, titled "Activities to Support Safe and Healthy Students," is copied in full in Appendix A. It states that each local educational agency that receives Title IV funding must use a portion of the funds to develop, implement, and evaluate programs that "are coordinated with other schools and community-based services and programs, foster safe, healthy, supportive, and drug-free environments that support student academic achievement, promote the involvement of parents in the activity or program, and may be conducted in partnership with an institution of higher education, business, nonprofit organization, community-based organization, or other public or private entity with a demonstrated record of success in implementing activities described in this section."[37] More specifically, this section of ESSA lists the types of programs that funding can cover. While drug and violence prevention programs are encouraged, the law states that they must be evidence-based to the extent that local agencies determine the evidence is reasonable available. While evidence-based might sound like an important and necessary qualification for programs that teach about violence prevention, there are very few programs that can claim the label of evidence-based, and many of these programs are much older—hence a larger amount of evidence—and are potentially outdated.

Some other activities that qualify for funding that could be interpreted as being related to sexual violence prevention are: school-based mental health services, which the law recommends be based on trauma-informed practices; programs that help prevent bullying and harassment, both of which are not defined in the law; the improvement of instructional practices for developing relationship-building skills (like effective communication) and improving safety

[37] *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 As Amended Through P.L. 114-95,* p. 226

through the recognition and prevention of coercion, violence, or abuse, including teen and dating violence, stalking, domestic abuse, and sexual violence and harassment; and mentoring and school counseling to students who may be experiencing abuse. Section 4108 also allows for local agencies to fund training for school personnel specifically related to trauma-informed practices in classroom management, crisis management and conflict resolution, human trafficking, school-based violence prevention strategies, and bullying and harassment prevention.

It is important to note while this is a long list of programs that could be related to sexual violence prevention, the list of activities that qualify for Title IV funding in ESSA is much longer, and includes many programs unrelated to sexual violence prevention. Local agencies have the autonomy to choose which programs on the list to fund, and could easily allocate this funding towards other important programs housed under this federal funding. For example, drug use prevention programs, which historically many schools tend to adopt, can be funded through Title IV. Additionally, programs designed to reduce the exclusionary discipline practices that would ultimately work towards prison reduction are housed in this section of ESSA. Thus, local agencies will receive a set amount of funding through Title IV, and will be forced either to choose between worthy programs like drug use prevention programs, prison reduction programs, and sexual violence prevention programs. Alternatively, local agencies might choose to provide all of these programs, but the funding would be spread so thin that each program risks being ineffective or flawed.

If local agencies do choose to use the funding towards some of the programs that are interpretable as sexual violence prevention programs, the language in this law is vague, and local agencies can quickly interpret it in a way that works in opposition of violence prevention efforts. In other words, there is no accountability measure to make sure that local agencies who do

choose to implement programs related to sexual violence do so in a way that experts on sexual violence would support. For example, the terms "effective communication" and "communication skills" could be interpreted as teaching students how to "just say no," which is a common trope in Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Education. Furthermore, as mentioned above, ESSA defines "violence" itself in very vague terms, so when the phrase "violence prevention" is used, local agencies could interpret this to mean violence unrelated to sexual violence and/or relationship abuse.

The one portion of ESSA that is very explicitly related to sexual violence and abuse prevention is part E of section 4108. This section discusses child sexual abuse, and it is important to note that this rhetoric comes directly from Erin's Law. Originating in Illinois and named after a survivor of child sexual abuse, Erin's Law requires that all public schools in each state that passes the law implement a prevention program that teaches students in grades K-12 techniques to recognize child sexual abuse and tell a trusted adult, teaches school personnel about child sexual abuse, and teaches parents and guardians the warning signs of child sexual abuse and provides them with resources.[38] Unfortunately, only 26 states have adopted Erin's law. The inclusion of Erin's Law in ESSA might encourage more states to adopt its policies since ESSA provides federal funding to implement the policies. Prior to ESSA, states that adopted Erin's Law did not have access to funding to implement it.

One of the greatest gains to come out of ESSA for those who care about sex education and sexual violence prevention is a new source of federal funding for these programs. Prior to ESSA, the federal funding for sex education was limited mostly to pregnancy prevention

[38] "What is Erin's Law?" Erin's Law, June 12, 2015, accessed February 16, 2017, http://erinslaw.org/about/what-is-erins-law/

programs and AIDS/HIV and STI prevention programs. While this new source of funding *can* be interpreted and used towards sexual violence prevention efforts, the discretion is very much left up to local government agencies. The Title IV funding from ESSA is a step in the right direction, but will only lead to greater sexual violence prevention efforts if states and local agencies get on board.

***State Laws Regarding Sex Education and Sexual Violence Prevention***

Currently, state policies on sex education are inconsistent across the United States. Only 24 states and the District of Columbia mandate sex education. Only 13 states require that the sex education be "medically accurate" and only 26 states require that sex education programs be age appropriate. While only 8 states require that sex education programs provide instruction that is appropriate for students' cultural background and not be biased against any race, sex, or ethnicity, only 2 states prohibit the program from promoting religion. There are 13 states that require sex education to discuss sexual orientation, and 4 of those states explicitly require only heteronormative information on sexual orientation. There are a very small number of states that require age-appropriate, culturally sensitive, and inclusive information be taught in sex education, yet 37 states require that information about abstinence be provided, with 26 of those states requiring that abstinence be stressed. This is the case even though there have been numerous studies (as mentioned before) that show the problematic nature of abstinence education. Finally, and most relevant to the topics discussed in this paper, 20 states and the District of Columbia require that sex education include information about skills for avoiding coerced sex. While this rule might seem disguised as one that confronts the realities of rape, sexual assault, and relationship abuse, it puts the onus on potential victims to avoid unhealthy situations, rather than teaching young people that it is not okay to coerce someone into engaging

in sexual activity.[39] In addition to these requirements, only 26 states have adopted Erin's Law, which—as previously mentioned—deals with preventing child sexual abuse.

The new funding from ESSA provides an opportunity for more states to adopt policies that would better teach young people about intimate relationships and sexual violence. Though local agencies and school districts will likely have the autonomy to choose their own curriculum and decide how to use the new funding from ESSA, there will be some direction given by state governments via their state plans for ESSA. While it would be beneficial to look at each state plan to see what direction they are moving in regards to allocating Title IV funding to sexual violence prevention programs, unfortunately, states are currently in the process of writing their plans for implementing ESSA, and many states have not yet released the plans or even drafts of the plans. However, there is some information available about legislation introduced recently on the state level dealing with sex education that could offer a glimpse into what we might expect from state governments regarding the "violence prevention" portion of ESSA.

In 2016, there were a number of state policies introduced that dealt specifically with education about healthy relationships and sexual violence prevention, most of which were not enacted (please see Table 3 in Appendix B for a detailed list of the sex education legislation pertaining to healthy relationships, sexual violence, and/or relationship abuse introduced on the state level in 2016). Twelve state legislatures introduced bills dealing with these topics, and 3 of those states introduced multiple bills or different versions of the bill in the House and the Senate. Of the 15 total bills introduced, 11 failed. Specifically, legislators in Arizona, Georgia, Hawaii, Mississippi, Missouri, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Utah, and Washington introduced bills that would require schools to provide sex education that touches upon sexual assault, relationship

[39] "Sex and HIV Education," Guttmacher Institute. 2016, https://www.guttmacher.org/state-policy/explore/sex-and-hiv-education

violence, and/or healthy relationships, and all of these bills failed and/or were adjourned. Many of the bills lumped the requirement about sexual violence in with other requirements—like medical accuracy and parental permission—which could potentially explain the failure of the bill. However, if a stipulation about medical accuracy (which may seem like a no-brainer) fails to pass, it is unlikely that a requirement to teach about sexual assault and relationship violence will pass. As mentioned before, only 13 states currently require that sex education be medically accurate,[40] and it is clear from the 2016 state bills that that number is not going to increase in the near future.

While the majority of bills encouraging education about sexual violence and healthy relationships failed, there are a few bills that have a chance of passing. Massachusetts, Michigan, and New York each have bills that are pending approval. Michigan seems to have one of the most progressive bills, outlining a definition of affirmative consent that many advocates and victims would support. The Michigan legislation posits that in order for sexual activity to be consensual, both parties must give affirmative consent. The legislation defines affirmative consent as,

> "affirmative, conscious, and voluntary agreement to engage in sexual activity; that it is the responsibility of each individual involved in the sexual activity to ensure that he or she has the affirmative consent of the other to engage in the sexual activity; that lack of protest or resistance does not mean consent and that silence does not mean consent; that affirmative consent must be ongoing throughout a sexual activity and can be revoked at any time; and that the existence of a dating relationship between the persons involved, or the fact of past sexual relations between them, should never by itself be assumed to be an indicator of consent."[41]

This definition is quite progressive, and one that we are just beginning to see on college campuses around the country. It is consistent with the definition of consent described in the

[40] "Sex and HIV Education"
[41] Michigan (State), Legislature, House of Representatives, *The Revised School Code* (HB 4903), 2016.

"Defining Behaviors" section of this paper. The passing of this bill would be an important step in the right direction, but again, policies can only go so far to hold local agencies and independent parties accountable.

The New York bill, if passed, would add prevention of sexual abuse and assault to health education in all public schools. It would require sex education instruction to be based on current practice and standards and to include recognizing, avoiding, refusing and reporting sexual abuse and assault. The terms "avoiding, refusing, and reporting" are concerning. Again, avoiding and refusing sexual abuse and assault puts the onus on the victim rather than the perpetrator of the violence. While this bill might seem progressive on the surface, it is actually in line with many existing policies that have schools teach students how to avoid sexual violence and relationship abuse, rather than teaching the potential perpetrators in the room that sexual violence, relationship abuse, coercion, etc. are not okay, and that affirmative consent is imperative.

The Massachusetts House and Senate bills would ensure that schools provide education that helps students develop relationship and communication skills to form healthy relationships free of violence, coercion, and intimidation. This language is a little less problematic than the New York bill, because it implies that all parties in a relationship would be responsible for maintaining healthy communication. However, an earlier portion of this bill mentions that every public school must teach the benefits of abstinence as well. This does not mean abstinence-only education, but the language about sexual violence and relationship abuse prevention is vague enough that paired with the mention of abstinence, local agencies, schools, and individual teachers could choose to interpret "communication skills" as "just say no," which does not promote student autonomy and choice in their sexuality.

Based on the language of bills proposed as well as their success rate, it is clear that legislation on the state level is not very promising for sexual and relationship violence prevention, nor is it very promising for sex education in general. Not only did most of the bills relating to violence prevention fail, but even among the bills that are still pending, the language is vague enough that local agencies, schools, and individual instructors could end up teaching "healthy relationships" in a way that means "no physically intimate relationships at all." Rather than ensuring that all teens learn how to make a wide range of decisions surrounding sex and intimate relationships, these bills leave room for teens to be taught only how to say no, and not how to say yes in a safe, consensual way.

***Expert Opinions on Sex Education and Public Policy***

Interviews with various experts were helpful in further illuminating the realities of some of the federal and state policies discussed above. While it is possible to speculate about the possible interpretations of the language in ESSA and the state bills proposed, experts were able to elaborate on how these policies function in local agencies, schools, and classrooms. The rhetoric of the laws themselves is important, but what happens on a state, local, school, or even personal level can vary drastically from what one might assume based on reading legislation. Shelagh Johnson, the Youth Sexual Health Coordinator in the Oregon Public Health Authority, provided a deeper insight into the execution of federal and state policies on sex education and sexual violence prevention. Prior to section 4108 of ESSA, the only federal funding for sex education was specifically for HIV/AIDS and STI prevention and pregnancy prevention, and according to Johnson, local agencies who cared about sexual violence prevention education would have to just make it happen without funding. The passing of ESSA provided the first ever source of funding for sexual violence prevention, which was outlined above.

Unfortunately, there is nuance and there are barriers surrounding the funding that limit states' and local agencies' ability to use that funding for sexual violence prevention. Johnson specifically discussed the portion of ESSA that comes from Erin's Law (part E in section 4108 of ESSA). It is true that ESSA provides federal funding that Erin's Law never had before, but Johnson explained that states and local agencies have not yet seen this money. The nonprofit organized around Erin's Law has been posting on Facebook that states should expect the money soon, but they have not yet received funding. Schools cannot afford training time for teachers, curriculum, or support without funding for Erin's Law, making it incredibly difficult for schools to comply with the policy.

Not only are states not receiving the money to implement sexual violence prevention programs, but Johnson explained that because there are certain stipulations in ESSA that call for "evidence-based" programs, there are very few programs to choose from once states do receive the funding. Furthermore, Johnson says that many of the programs that do qualify as "evidenced-based," are outdated or do not cover all of the material that a quality sexual violence prevention program should. Additionally, even if there was an outstanding program to implement, Johnson mentioned that unless sexual violence and abuse prevention is a top priority for the state, the funding from ESSA will likely go towards unrelated programs. She said that in the current political climate, it is unlikely that most states will prioritize sexual violence prevention.

Johnson also discussed the language of most laws dealing with sex education and sexual violence prevention, mentioning that when many programs say that they teach students communication and negotiation skills, they are often talking about abstinence. She notes that while abstinence can be considered a form of sex education, it does not function as violence prevention. Johnson gave an anecdote about a very conservative school district in Oregon that

has some funding to implement a "rape prevention" program, though this same school district does not allow comprehensive sex education. When Johnson asked them how they are incorporating the topic of consensual sex in their "rape prevention" program, the representative from that school said that they don't do the "s" word, meaning they don't use the word "sex". In reality, the "rape prevention" program was just a thinly veiled abstinence program that told students not to engage in sexual activity and to "just say no." Johnson noted that even in a more moderate school district in Oregon, the curriculum that was supposed to deal with boundaries and negotiation was just about saying no. This points to the interpretability of some of the language in ESSA, and how political ideology can dictate how states and local agencies choose to interpret that language. Unfortunately, many agencies choose to interpret policies in a way that does not truly educate students about sexual violence.

Dr. Jonathan Zimmerman, a professor of History of Education at the University of Pennsylvania and author of *Too Hot to Handle: A Global History of Sex Education*, provided valuable insight into the politics of sex education, explaining this divisive and partisan nature of the issue. In regards to the inclusion of provisions of Tim Kaine's Teach Safe Relationships Act in the Every Student Succeeds Act, Zimmerman noted that he had been against this inclusion, not because he did not believe in what the Teach Safe Relationships Act sought to accomplish, but because he believed that adding a provision about sex education and sexual violence prevention would only further politicize an already contentious Every Student Succeeds Act. While Zimmerman said that if he were an elected official, he would have voted to keep the language about healthy relationships in the bill, he knows that there are limitations in this law's accountability and enforcement abilities, which Johnson's anecdote about the program that wouldn't use the word "sex" is an example of. Even though there might be language in ESSA

about teaching healthy relationships, this is just a small portion of a very large bill, and the bill does not outline what healthy relationships are, how this topic should be taught, or mandate that the topic be taught at all.

Zimmerman also pointed out that sex education is undeniably a partisan issue. He explained that before the AIDS epidemic, the question of sex education was not about how it should be taught, but whether it should be taught at all. Many liberals were pro-sex education and many conservatives believed that it was a family or clerical matter that had no place in schools. Post-AIDS, the view that sex education was a family or clerical matter became untenable, and the debate shifted (though it is still a partisan debate). Because of this shift, Zimmerman says that many liberals don't actually see how much of a concession abstinence-only education is for conservatives. Though Abstinence-Only Until Marriage Education (AOUME) is seen as highly problematic—and Zimmerman agrees that it is—it is still more than conservatives historically would have liked to see in schools. With that, I will now shift gears to discuss how these polices and debates play out on a school and classroom level.

## FORMAL SEX EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

It is clear that public policy plays a role in what gets taught on a school level in sex education courses, because it dictates the amount of funding for certain types of programs and can guide local agencies and schools in choosing which programs to implement. However, simply looking at public policy cannot provide the most detailed illustration of what is being taught in schools, how it is being taught, and what is being left out. This section of my thesis takes a more in depth look at the experiential realities of sex education.

### *Rape, Relationships, and Desire: What's Missing in Formal Sex Education*

In her seminal work *Sexuality, Schools, and Adolescent Females: The Missing Discourse of Desire*, Michelle Fine named four discourses surrounding sex education: sexuality as violence, sexuality as victimization, sexuality as individual morality, and a discourse of desire. The first discourse, sexuality as violence, assumes that heterosexuality is potentially violent, and that silence surrounding issues of sexuality will lead to less sexual interaction among adolescents and thus less violence. The second discourse, sexuality as victimization, is quite common in formal sex education today, and posits that female adolescent sexuality is a moment of victimization and therefore young women should protect themselves from things like STIs, pregnancy, and "being used." Fine argues that this discourse ignores women's potential desire to engage in sexual activity, assumes that violence is contingent upon unmarried heterosexual relationships (rather than a product of gendered, classed, and racialized institutions), and is incredibly heteronormative. The third discourse, sexuality as individual morality (reflected in AOUME), does allow for female sexual decision making, but only if that decision is in the direction of modesty, chastity, and abstinence until marriage. The fourth discourse, the discourse of desire, which allows for discussion of female desire, pleasure, and a discussion of what feels good and

what doesn't, is often only seen as an interruption in educational settings. If desire is discussed, it is usually tagged with reminders of 'consequences.' Ultimately, Fine argues that teens are entitled to a sex education that discusses desire rather than a sex education that perpetuates anti-sex rhetoric. Those who are most 'at risk' for victimization—low-income young women of color and non-heterosexual young men—are the ones who are hurt the most from the lack of a discourse of desire as well as the lack of critical conversation surrounding what victimization actually means.[42]

In her work *The Sex Education Debates,* Nancy Kendall illustrates similar issues with the discourse surrounding sex education. Kendall asserts that all of the sex education classes she observed and most curricula made assumptions about healthy teen sexuality and individual sexual behavior that reflected hegemonic class, race, gender and sexual norms. Even comprehensive sex education programs assumed that all high school students were white, middle class, heterosexual, rational decision makers who had the right and responsibility to control their environment and sexual encounters. This type of education puts equal responsibility on all individuals, not accounting for the varying privileges and abilities of different populations. Kendall also noted that in all of the classrooms she observed—both abstinence only and comprehensive sex education classes—the teachers emphasized that *women* were not to blame for rape, but also emphasized that women should avoid rape. This is similar to what Michelle Fine called the sexuality as victimization discourse, which assumes women are the only victims and that it is the onus of the victim to protect themselves. Kendall says, "there was no discussion of the broader social drivers of sexual violence, nor were students presented with statistics or personal stories of family abuse, abuse within marriage or long term relationships, or child

[42] Michelle Fine, "Sexuality, Schooling, and Adolescent Females: The Missing Discourse of Desire."

abuse. This is a troubling finding that points to the silences, inequities, and continued stigmas that shape AOUME and CSE approaches alike."[43] Additionally, none of the teachers that Kendall observed acknowledged that there could be (and probably were) students in the classroom that experienced rape or sexual violence themselves. This further contributes to the lack of acknowledgement of those under the age of 18 who have experienced intimate partner violence.

Kendall also notes that conversations about rape were minimal, but that when conversations took place, they were legalistic and highly contested by students. None of the programs that she observed discussed how the media and consumerism play into concepts of sexual violence. For example, there were no conversations about victim blaming and its relationship to the images of women portrayed in the media. Teachers did not ask students. "if a girl were to dress the way women in advertisements are portrayed, would she be responsible for sending 'signals' to potential sexual partners or perpetrators?" Questions like this help to deconstruct myths about who is to blame for sexual violence, and engage students in a conversation around a topic they can understand: media and popular culture.[44]

In her work *Sex Education and Rape,* Michelle Anderson expands upon the ways in which media influence teens' notions of sexual violence and relationships, and says that teens may learn as much from media consumption as they do from sex education. Anderson explains that popular media's sexual content has a negative influence on sexual health, because messages about sex in popular media teach "rigid gender roles and a degraded view of females as sexual objects for male use."[45] Sexual content in popular media is often quite heteronormative, portrays sex as a game, and can change teens' attitudes towards rape. The American Psychological

[43] Nancy Kendall, *The Sex Education Debates*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Michelle Anderson, "Sex Education and Rape," *Michigan Journal of Gender and Law* 17, no. 83 (2013): 83-109.

Association warned that the "sexualization of girls [in the media] may not only reflect sexist attitudes, a societal tolerance of sexual violence, and the exploitation of girls and women, but may also contribute to these phenomena."[46]

While teens do learn a lot about sex and relationships from media, teens in Anderson's study also indicated that formal sex education programs in schools are one of their most important sources of information about sex. The problem though, is that formal sex education in school does not do much to offset the negative messages that teens receive from media. Sex education does not help students understand how to express their desires and/or create boundaries or to ask about their partner(s)' boundaries and desires. Anderson points out that both parents and young adults want to discuss rape, sexual assault, relationships, and pressures to have sex in sex education. Teens stated that they would want to know what to do if their friend were raped or sexually assaulted and currently do not learn about this in formal sex education. Ultimately, Anderson argues that students should be receiving an anti-rape education—an education that helps students learn how to negotiate sex and teaches them about media literacy—so that they can effectively communicate and engage with their partners in a humane way and so that they can counter ideas and images in the media that perpetuate rape culture and portray unrealistic constructions of sex.

While Michelle Fine argues for a discourse of desire, Kendall argues for a shift away from sex education as scientific, and Anderson argues for curriculum that teaches students how to negotiate sex, Sharon Lamb argues for an ethics-based curriculum in her book *Sex Ed for Caring Schools*. Lamb notes some major criticisms of different sex education curricula as they stand today: they do not acknowledge that teens are having sex, teen sex is stereotyped and

[46] Eileen L. Zurbriggen, Rebecca L. Collins, Sharon Lamb, "Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls," *American Psychological Association,* http://www.apa.org/pi/women/programs/girls/report-full.pdf

described only as a problem, teens are represented as children in danger, curricula still have inaccuracies, a heterosexist, white, middle-class bias persists, pleasure is absent, gender stereotypes continue to be a problem, teaching approaches miss the mark, health is a focus at the expense of other issues, and curricula are ineffective and lack a moral perspective. Ultimately, Lamb argues that sex education should be no different from education on other subjects, and should be considered a form of democratic citizenship education; it should be non-restrictive, non-dogmatic, inclusive and proactive in addressing stereotypes inequalities, and should be tied to a process similar to a shared governance.[47]

Overall, the scholarship above can be summed up in six critiques of formal sex education: 1) sex education does not allow for discussions of pleasure and desire, which further stigmatizes and dehumanizes sex, 2) sex education assumes dominant class, race, gender, and sexual norms, which caters to a white, upper/middle class, heterosexual male point of view, 3) sex education doesn't frequently discuss sexual violence or relationship abuse, but when it does, it puts the onus on the victim rather than on the perpetrator of violence (in other words, it teaches young people "don't get raped" instead of "don't rape."), 4) sex education approaches conversations about rape in a legalistic manner and discusses the ramifications of rape rather than discussing healthy power dynamics in a relationship and modeling healthy relationship behavior for students, 5) sex education does not address the other locations where students might be learning about sex like the media or porn, and 6) sex education is seen as a way to address public health concerns like teen pregnancy and HIV/AIDS rather than as a crucial factor in educating healthy democratic citizens.

[47] Sharon Lamb, "*Sex Ed for Caring Schools: Creating an Ethics-based Curriculum*.

***Expert Opinions on Sex Education***

The experts revealed a lot of important information about the classroom dynamics of sex education. Dr. Nanci Coppola is the CEO of a program called Program Reach, which promotes what Dr. Coppola calls risk avoidance education. According to the Program Reach website, Risk avoidance involves "avoiding risky behavior such as: sexual activity, alcohol and other drugs, and violence."[48] However, the term "risk avoidance" is known to be dog whistle politics for abstinence-only education, meaning that many of Dr. Coppola's classrooms probably resemble a certain form of abstinence–only education. Dr. Coppola believes that healthy relationships and risk avoidance are intertwined, because in her view, avoiding sexual activity altogether would decrease the chances of violence. This is the philosophy that she teaches through Program Reach. Zimmerman noted that many individuals in the abstinence-only camp believe that the only healthy relationship is one that exists within marriage, which sheds a little more light into the reasoning behind Coppola's philosophy.

Zimmerman explains that the issue with abstinence only education is that in order to teach about sexual violence, one must admit and accept the fact that teenagers are sexual beings, and that many abstinence programs do not do this. Al Vernacchio, a sexuality educator at Friends Central High School in Wynwood, Pennsylvania, says that AOUME does not teach students to have agency, value clarification, or decision making skills which are the types of skills that students would need to truly understand consent and how to make choices about one's own sexual activity. Vernacchio says that there is a lot of lip service given to "no means no," but that education surrounding affirmative consent – like the education the Michigan Bill promotes—is not happening enough. Vernacchio, who works in a private school, notes that the majority of sex

[48] "Risk Avoidance Education," Program Reach, accessed February 13, 2017, http://www.programreach.org/risk-avoidance/

educators who go to school specifically for sexuality education are working in private schools, and that this is likely where the highest quality sex education is happening. Johnson agrees that she has noticed thorough and successful sex education happening almost exclusively in private schools, because public schools have a number of other priorities and do not have the money nor capacity to make sex education a main focus. On the contrary, private schools are able to have programming that lasts throughout the year, and can bolster this programming with clubs and guest speakers.

The question of who teaches sex education is a very large part of the issue. Vernacchio says that he has many colleagues who are doing really great sexuality work, but knows that the majority are not. He explains that the burden is often put on biology teachers, health and physical education teachers, or counselors—who have not had any kind of specialized academic training in how to teach human sexuality. This, he believes, is a very big problem, especially since it is unlikely that schools are going to prioritize hiring a qualified sexuality educator when there are so many other important issues to prioritize. Zimmerman alludes to a concept that explains one of the many reasons that is it important to have teachers who are specially trained in human sexuality. He pointed out that a big problem for the biology teachers, gym teachers, etc. who teach sex education is that they also are sexual beings. Since a quality sex education would involve acknowledging humans are sexual beings (teachers and young people included), it is a natural line of inquiry for a young person to ask about a teacher's sexuality. And if a biology teacher, gym teacher, or counselor is teaching sex education because no one else in the school can do it, they are going to be less likely to feel comfortable opening a space where students could potentially ask them about their own lives. Zimmerman explains that this reality causes many educators to avoid certain topics relating to sex altogether.

As a historian, Zimmerman also explained that there are two main reasons that so many sex education teachers are health or physical education teachers. The first reason is that once groupings and tracks[49] were implemented in schools across the United States, math and English classes were no longer universal in reach, since students on different tracks would take different classes. Sex education was something that needed to be taught through a course that everyone took, which could not be done in courses that were tracked, so they were tied to physical education classes. Secondly, Zimmerman notes that historically in the United States, physical education was gender segregated. Since there is a feeling in this country that sex is a subject in which boys and girls should not be learning together, schools thought physical education was a good place to house sex education. Thus, sex education became tied to physical education solely because it was a class in which boys and girls did not learn together. Zimmerman notes that while there are some physical education teachers that teach sex education expertly, there are many who do not, and many who find it odd that they are the individuals adjoined to teach sex education.

A point that Zimmerman, Johnson, Vernacchio, and Coppola all agree on is that sex education as it stands today is not reaching teens the way it should be, whether this is because of the educators who teach sex education, the lack of funding for quality programs, or political ideology getting in the way of holistic information. For these reasons, each of these experts had opinions about where young people are going to get the information they may be missing in their formal sex education classes in school. Zimmerman notes while schools teach a very technical version of sex education, young people want to know things like "who do I do this with? When?

[49] Tracking means separating students by academic ability into groups for all subjects or certain classes and curriculum within a school.

Why? Do I have to be in Love? What's the meaning of it?" These are tough questions to teach in a school context – though individuals like Al Vernacchio are doing it – so many students who cannot find these answers in a school context are getting information elsewhere.

As an educator, Vernacchio says that most of the students come to his class with a very limited understanding of consent, sexual violence prevention, or the connection between values and sexual decision making. Very few students say that they learned from their parents, and Vernacchio says that parental messages tend to be very fear-based. Johnson, who is also a former educator, notes that many students also receive implicit messages from their parents, whether they are single and dating or still married. Parental relationships can act as a model for young people whether those parental relationships are a positive or negative influence. Vernacchio adds that it is also not the parents' fault if they are not properly teaching their kids about sex and intimate relationships, since there aren't many opportunities to train parents to have these conversations and they likely didn't grow up with an amazing sex education themselves. Vernacchio tries to mitigate this reality by providing workshops specifically for parents to learn how to talk to their kids about sex and intimate relationship, and says that many parents express how ill equipped they feel to have these conversations and don't know where to start.

Not only does Vernacchio provide workshops to parents, but he teaches an incredibly holistic and progressive sex education course at Friends Central High School. He teaches what he deems "sex education as social justice education" under a definition of sex that is not heteronormative and does not only involve vaginal intercourse. When talking to students about sexual violence, relationship abuse, and violence prevention, he uses the term sexual violence as an umbrella term to talk about the many different types of violence that could constitute sexual violence. He asks students to name the types of sexual violence that they are aware of, and

challenges them to deconstruct those behaviors. For example, if a student mentions rape, the class has a discussion about different kinds of rape. Then, he urges students to think about homophobia and sexism and other oppressive constructs as forms of violence in themselves. Vernacchio says that many students come in to his class thinking that sexual violence prevention means making sure "that someone doesn't jump out of the bushes and attack me when I'm walking down the street," but that there are other forms of violence that are far more likely to happen. He tries to get his students to think about what the things in their world are that they are most likely to encounter.

Vernacchio says that while he doesn't like to rely on statistics for conversations about sexual violence, he uses them as a tool. Firstly, statistics help students understand how prevalent some sexual violence really is. Secondly, showing the difference in statistics between women experiencing violence versus men experiencing violence, heterosexual individuals versus people in the LGBT community experiencing violence, or people under 18 versus adults experiencing violence brings up a whole conversation about gender, sexuality, and power that explains why the numbers vary so much. He doesn't want to scare his students, but he wants them to think realistically about the society they live in. Next, Vernacchio talks about examples of different types of violence. He doesn't want to put experiences into categories, but he makes sure to discuss physical, emotional, verbal, digital, economic, and social abuse. Under each of those topics, he discusses microaggressions, aggressions, and what he calls macroaggressions. He thinks that too many high schoolers don't get enough experience talking about the microaggressions that happen every day in school, like someone putting their arm around you when it is unwanted, someone smacking your butt, or someone snapping your bra strap. These are all microaggressions that when added up, make a really big impact. He also talks about less

recognizable verbal microaggressions like using "you guys" to talk about mixed gender groupings, which has been shown in research to make a negative impact as well. Vernacchio then talks about macroaggressions, which he defines as violence enacted on whole groups of people. Examples of macroaggressions are using rape as a tool for war or the racist stereotypes around sex that categorize whole groups of people in a discriminatory and hypersexualized way. This really gets students to think about a broad spectrum of behaviors, showing that little things can be problematic and also showing that there are forms of violence that are institutionalized and systemic.

After students are able to recognize the many types of sexual violence that exist in our culture, Vernacchio talks to them about prevention. He of course mentions why certain types of violence prevention that say things like "watch what you wear" really just blame the potential victim of violence rather than the perpetrator, but additionally, Vernacchio discusses the ways in which students can minimize the amount of harm that could potentially come from the activities they engage in. Rather than what Coppola deemed "risk avoidance," Vernacchio stands in the harm reduction camp, knowing that its unrealistic for people to not engage in sexual activity, but that there are ways to minimize the potential harms. One example that Vernacchio gave of a conversation that centers around harm reduction was a conversation about sending nude photos. He acknowledges that some of his students are likely going to send nude photos, but that if sending these photos is something they really want to do, there are factors they can consider to make this behavior less potentially harmful. Vernacchio gets them to think about things like whether or not to show their face, identifying body markings, or things in the background of the photo that would identify the subject. He also has them think about where they are sending the message from, since phone numbers, emails, and Instagram accounts are easily traceable.

Basically, Vernacchio engages in a very honest, upfront, and realistic dialogue with his students that provides them with skills they can actually use in their life. Finally, Vernacchio talks with his students about what to do if a friend or someone else discloses that they are a survivor.

Vernacchio says that his sex education philosophy is that "if we teach kids about positive, socially just sex as our main orientation to sex education, we are then by definition going to decrease sexual violence. I talk about [sexual violence] as what it is—an aberration. If you spend all your time talking about the aberrations then people begin to think that that is reality. And I don't want kids to ever think that sexual violence is not a problem because it absolutely is, but I want them to see it as what happens when something is off. And if you are really being thoughtful, if you are not using another person as an object, and if you are being deliberate about your decisions, then we can all go a long way to preventing or lessening sexual violence." In other words, Vernacchio believes that if all young people had an honest, upfront sex education that discussed things like power, privilege, and oppression, there would organically be less sexual violence in our society. He adds that if teachers only get two hours to talk about sexual violence for the whole year, and they discuss statistics and fear-based messages, that would do as much damage as porn could in terms of warping young peoples' perspectives.

While Vernacchio's version of sex education is one that many—including Zimmerman—would love to see replicated, there are other programs that are trying to accomplish similar goals. One program that Johnson spoke fondly of is called FLASH, which Seattle's King County has implemented. This program combines pregnancy prevention, STI and HIV/AIDS prevention, and sexual violence prevention into one curriculum, using the Social-Ecological Model and the Confluence Model. The Social Ecological Model addresses factors at the individual, relationship, community and society levels that put people at risk of experiencing violence as a victim or

perpetrator. The Confluence Model of Sexual Aggression suggests that negative developmental experiences during childhood can lead to a rigid, violent and objectifying view of women, which is a significant risk factor for perpetrating sexual violence. The FLASH curriculum addresses this by focusing heavily on increasing respect for all genders and breaking down harmful gender stereotypes. This is a refreshing method for addressing sexual violence since many programs still place the burden on potential victims to "avoid coercion" or "avoid violence," while perpetuating harmful stereotypes about virginity and purity.

The FLASH curriculum is just one of many examples of curricula that people are creating across the country. Unfortunately, it is incredibly difficult to find out which curricula schools are using for sex education. Johnson explained that usually, the only way to find this information is to call up school districts and ask. And even then, some schools might refuse to divulge that information. While people like Johnson desperately want to work with schools to make sure that they are implementing positive curricula that will work to combat sexual violence, it is incredibly difficult to understand what is going on inside schools and in individual classrooms.

The next section of this paper seeks to explore what young people have actually been learning inside classrooms, and how it has impacted their view of intimate relationships and sexual violence. While the results of these surveys are by no means a definitive answer, they shed light on some important trends. Before getting into the results, it is important to note an essential insight that Zimmerman mentioned. He said, "there's so little sex education in the aggregate that making any generalization and making any claim about outcomes is just a fool's errand. If you turn on the radio and you hear anyone say 'sex ed in schools does x'—either on the right it makes kids have more sex or on the left it makes kids use condoms—if they are speaking with great certainty, write them off as an ideologue and stop listening. Just think about

it. If a kid, as a matter of social science, is exposed to six hours of sex education in the aggregate in a year, how are you ever going to show that the six hours were determinative not just in what the kids think but in what the kid does." Zimmerman says that while good sex education can change what a student knows the same way a good algebra education can, it is a lot harder to say that a good sex education is going to change someone's behavior. Thus, the results of these surveys are not definitive. While they can explain what certain young people know or perceive, they can only explain the impact of sex education as one factor in a young person's world view and behavior. The results of these surveys will also shed light on what other factors have been formative in young people's learning about intimate relationships and sexual violence.

***PRRI's Survey Results About Sex Education***

The Public Religion Research Institute conducted a survey in 2015 called "How Race and Religion Shape Millennial Attitudes on Sexuality and Reproductive Health." A small portion of this survey dealt with young peoples' experience with sex education. The vast majority of millennials in this study reported attending public middle schools (81%) and public high schools (82%). Only 9% of millennials reported attending a private religiously affiliated middle school and 8% reported attending a private religiously affiliated high school.

About three-fourths of millennials surveyed reported having some exposure to sex education in middle or high school, while 23% reported that they did not take a sex education class in middle or high school. Because this survey had a religious focus, it found that white Evangelical Protestants were the most likely to report never having had a sex education course.

One relevant and interesting piece of data that this survey found is that millennials overwhelmingly trust that the sex education they receive in school is medically accurate, even though only 13 states require it to be. Of the millennials that had sex education in school, 39%

believed that it was very accurate, 51% believed that it was somewhat accurate, and only 9% believed that the information presented to them was not accurate. However, even though these respondents believed that the information they received was accurate, fewer reported that this information was helpful to them in making personal decisions about sex and relationships. About 62% of millennials said that the information provided to them in sex education classes was very (19%) or somewhat (43%) helpful, and 37% of millennials said that sex education classes were not helpful to them at all when it came to making decisions about sex and relationships.

Overwhelmingly, the millennials in this survey said that the topic most frequently covered in sex education was STI prevention, with 86% of respondents saying that their class covered this topic. Seventy-eight percent of millennials reported that their sex education class covered pregnancy and birth control, and 71% said the class covered the topic of abstinence. A far fewer number of millennials (45%) reported that their sex education class covered the topic of healthy relationships, while only 12% reported that same-sex relationships were covered in their sex education class.

While a very large number of millennials said that their sex education class covered abstinence, very few believed that emphasizing abstinence was the best way to prevent unintended pregnancy. While only 23% of millennials believed that emphasizing abstinence was the best way to prevent unintended pregnancy, 67% believed that emphasizing safe sexual practices and birth control was the best way to prevent unintended pregnancy. These numbers varied when broken down by race and religion, with white Evangelical Protestants being the only group to believe that emphasis on abstinence is the best way to prevent unintended pregnancy. There were also partisan divides on this question, which is not surprising given the partisan nature of this subject. Seventy-nine percent of millennial Democrats and two-thirds of millennial

independents agree that the best way to reduce the number of unintended pregnancies among young people is by emphasizing safe sexual practices and birth control. A small majority (51%) of millennial Republicans agreed, but 40% of millennial republicans said that emphasizing abstinence is the best approach.

However, despite some disagreement, there is widespread support among millennials for teaching comprehensive sex education in public schools, with 75% of millennials favoring teaching CSE in public schools. Only 21% of the millennials surveyed opposed teaching comprehensive sex education in schools. Support for comprehensive sex education persisted across all racial, ethnic, and religious groups.[50]

Overall, the PRRI survey showed that while millennials trust their sex education and would like to see a more comprehensive approach to sex education, their sex education is currently not helping them in real life situations related to sex and intimate relationships.

***Results About Sex Education from My Survey on Sex Education and Intimate Relationships***

I conducted a survey titled "Survey on Sex Education and Intimate Relationships" specifically for this paper, to fill certain gaps in information about young peoples' interaction with sex education and sexual violence. The demographic characteristics of the survey respondents were described in the methods section, and this section will describe and analyze the results of the sections in the survey dealing specifically with formal sex education. Before conducting my survey, I theorized that all types of sex education were not covering topics related to sexual violence at high enough rates or substantively enough, and that sex education was not helping students to understand how to deal with situations related to sexual violence. Overall, my survey supported my hypotheses. The survey found that sex education in schools is not preparing

[50] Daniel Cox and Robert P. Jones, *How Race and Religion Shape Millennial Attitudes on Sexuality and Reproductive Health*.

young people to answer fundamental fact-based questions about sexual violence, and that students who had AOUME were far less likely to have basic knowledge about sexual violence. My survey also confirmed the experts' hunch that most sex education is taught by general health or physical education teachers and that topics surrounding sexual violence are either covered briefly or not at all. Ultimately, and most consequentially, my survey found that the information that students learned in their sex education classes was not applicable to real-life situations involving sexual violence.

For context, it is important to note which type of sex education the survey respondents had during K-12 school, and who taught this course. A slight majority (53.24%) of respondents self-identified their sex education in school as comprehensive sex education (CSE),[51] almost a quarter (23.74%) said that they received Abstinence-Plus Education,[52] and 19.42% of respondents said that their sex education was Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Education (AOUME),[53] which are sometimes called Sexual Risk Avoidance Programs.

Respondents were also asked to choose a label that best described the teacher(s) who taught their sex education class. Chart 1 in Appendix C shows the results in more detail. A majority (61.87%) of respondents said that a general heath teacher taught their sex education course, almost a third of respondents said a gym teacher, and less than a quarter of respondents said someone who exclusively teaches about topics related to sex. A minimal number of

[51] Comprehensive Sex Education (CSE) was defined in the survey as sex education that "teaches about abstinence as the best method for avoiding STDs and unintended pregnancy, but also teaches about condoms and contraception to reduce the risk of unintended pregnancy and of infection with STDs, including HIV. It also teaches interpersonal and communication skills and helps young people explore their own values, goals, and options."
[52] Abstinence-Plus Education was defined as "programs which include information about contraception and condoms in the context of strong abstinence messages."
[53] Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Education (AOUME) was defined in the survey as sex education that teaches "abstinence as the only morally correct option of sexual expression for teenagers. They usually censor information about contraception and condoms for the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and unintended pregnancy."

respondents chose nurses, sports coaches, civics/government/history teachers, religiously affiliated individuals, parents, biology teachers, anatomy teachers, general science teachers, home economics teachers, and guidance counselors. Nevertheless, these results support the conclusions that the experts interviewed reached, since only 21.58% of respondents had a teacher who exclusively taught them about sex education. Furthermore, it is likely that when survey respondents indicated that they had a sex education teacher who exclusively taught about topics related to sex, they meant that this specific teacher did not have another teaching role in *their* life, though that teacher might have other roles in the school.

Understanding the general type of sex education and the type of teachers educating the survey respondents was important context for understanding the lived experiences of young people in sex education classes. But before delving deeper into the specific curricular aspects of respondent's sex education, I wanted to objectively test their knowledge about sexual violence and prevention. The survey asked a series of fact-based true or false questions about sexual violence to see if survey respondents were able to answer correctly based on their current knowledge. These questions helped provide a constant that survey responses could be compared across. For example, if two people both said that they learned extensively about rape and sexual assault in their sex education course, but only one was able to answer these fact-based questions correctly, it shows that the other individual did not learn accurate information in their sex education course or did not receive the information in a way that was digestible. Table 4 shows the percentage of individuals who got these questions correct and which type of sex education they had.

The first fact-based statement said, "rape is caused by an uncontrollable sexual urge." This statement is false, and only a slim majority (55.4%) of respondents answered correctly.

Over a quarter (28.78%) of respondents answered "true" and 15.83% of respondents were unsure of the answer to this question. The next statement said, "most sexual assaults are committed by strangers. It's not rape if the people involved knew each other," which is false. An overwhelming majority of respondents (90.24%) were able to answer this question correctly. The next statement was not as easily answered. It read, "arguing can be a healthy part of a relationship," and while this statement is true, 56.12% of respondents were able to answer correctly with 26.62% thinking this was false and another 17.27% being unsure. The next question dealt with how to respond when someone discloses they have experienced sexual violence stating, "The first thing you should do when someone tells you they have been sexually assaulted/abused is ask them what happened." This statement is false, but fewer than half of the respondents (49.64%) were able to answer this correctly. A quarter believed this was the correct course of action, but another quarter of respondents were unsure what to do in this situation.

The next two statements intended to test respondents' knowledge about who is responsible for sexual violence. The first statement said, "if a perpetrator of sexual assault or relationship abuse is under the influence of drugs or alcohol, they are still responsible for their actions," and most respondents (86.33%) new that this is true. Still, 5.76% of respondents thought that perpetrators were not responsible for their actions if under the influence of drugs or alcohol, and 7.91% were unsure. The final true or false statement read, "if someone who has experienced rape, sexual assault, or relationship abuse was under the influenced of drugs or alcohol at the time of this experience, it is partially their fault," which is absolutely false. About three-quarters (76.95%) of respondents answered correctly, but 15.83% of respondents believed this statement was true and 7.19% were unsure.

While respondents' level of educational attainment did not make them much more or less likely to respond to these questions correctly, the type of sex education respondents' had in school made a clear difference (see Table 4). For each of the fact-based questions asked, respondents' who had AOUME answered correctly at lower rates that respondents who had comprehensive sex education. In other words, those with AOUME education were less likely to answer these questions correctly. The largest discrepancy was found in the question that asked "if someone who has experienced rape, sexual assault, or relationship abuse was under the influenced of drugs or alcohol at the time of this experience, it is partially their fault." While 83.78% of respondents who had comprehensive sex education got this question correct, only 59.26% of respondents who had AOUME and only 72.73% of respondents who had Abstinence-Plus education got this question correct. This result connects directly back to Draupadi's story, who shared that her sex education led her to feel shame and blame for her experience of sexual violence. It is clear that AOUME programs like hers are not doing enough to show that victims are never at fault for their experiences.

Only after respondents answered the fact-based questions about sexual violence were they asked to divulge what they learned in their sex education course. The survey asked whether certain topics were discussed and how long they were discussed for. About two-thirds (66.91%) of respondents said that they discussed the topic of healthy relationships in their sex education class, which is a higher percentage than the PRRI survey found. However, almost a quarter (23.74%) of respondents said that they did not discuss healthy relationships at all, and only 15.11% of respondents said that they discussed healthy relationships for two or more class periods. Most respondents only spent between two class periods and less than a full class period discussing healthy relationships.

With the topic of abusive relationships, 63.59% of survey respondents said that they discussed this in sex education, and over a quarter (26.62%) said that they did not discuss this topic at all. Only 10.07% said that they discussed this topic for two or more class periods. To see how substantial the conversation about abusive relationships was, respondents were asked if they discussed myths and misconceptions about abusive relationships, and 46.76% said no. A little over a third (35.25%) said that they did discuss myths and misconceptions and about 18% were unsure if their sex education class discussed this.

The topic of sexual assault and rape was discussed slightly less frequently than the topics of healthy relationships and abusive relationships. Only 58.27% of respondents said that they discussed this topic in their sex education class, with a third (33.09%) responding that they did not discuss this and 8.63% being unsure. For the individuals who did discuss this topic in sex education class, only 14.39% said that they spent more than two class periods on the topic and 43.16% spent less than two class periods on this topic. Less than half (43.17%) of respondents discussed myths and misconceptions about sexual assault and rape. When asked if their formal sex education class acknowledged that there could be people in the class who have experienced sexual assault, rape, stalking, or other forms of intimate partner violence, only 38.85% said yes. Close to half (48.92%) said that there was no acknowledgement of potential survivors in the room. When asked if resources for survivors of sexual violence were explained, 53.96% said yes, 34.53% said no, and the rest were unsure.

A surprising trend was that students in who had AOUME discussed the topics of healthy relationships, abusive relationships, and sexual assault and/or rape at the highest rates, compared to their peers who had Abstinence-Plus or CSE. This data is shown in Table 5. However, even though students in AOUME were more likely to have discussed healthy relationships, abusive

relationships, and sexual assault and/or rape, it should be noted that these students were also the least likely to answer fact-based questions about sexual violence correctly. This means that even though they are discussing these topics, they are likely not learning accurate information and are probably getting the fear-based messages that many experts alluded to.

The topics covered in sex education classes not only varied by type of sex education (AOUME, Abstinence-Plus, or CSE), but they also varied by school type. Many of the experts interviewed above indicated that private schools likely had higher quality sex education programs, and while there weren't too many survey respondents that went to private school, their responses support that hypothesis. Students who attended private school were more likely to be taught sex education by a teacher who exclusively taught about topics related to sex, were more likely to have learned about healthy relationships, abusive relationships, rape and sexual assault, and the myths and misconceptions surrounding each of these topics, were more likely to have discussed pornography, were more likely to have had resources for survivors provided for the, and were more likely to have had a teacher that acknowledged a survivor could be in the room.

But it is not enough just to ask what curricular aspects were covered in young peoples' sex education class. It is important to know if the information they learned is actually applicable to experiences of sexual violence. Unfortunately, this was not the case. Of the individuals who indicated they had experienced some form of sexual violence, over half (57.5%) said that the sex education they received in school did not help them to understand or cope with their experience, 29.21% said that it helped somewhat, and only 12.2% said that it did help them. Of the individuals who know someone else who had experienced sexual violence, 60.74% said that their formal sex education did not help them speak to this person about their experience. When this same group was asked if their sex education in school helped them understand how to help this

person, 56.6% said no. This is consistent with PRRI's survey results, where millennials indicated that they did not find the information provided in sex education to be helpful.

Overall, it is clear from the scholars' and experts' perspectives as well as the survey results that sex education as it stands is not doing a sufficient job of teaching about sexual violence and preparing students to prevent and respond to these issues. Topics related to sexual violence were discussed infrequently, and most survey respondents indicated that this information did not help them in real-life situations relating to sexual violence. Sex education is also not doing a sufficient job at teaching students how to critically consume media, including pornography. The next section of this paper will outline some of literature about the effects of pornography on young people, and discuss what experts and my survey results revealed about this topic.

## PORNOGRAPHY AND MEDIA

It is important to discuss the role that pornography has in young peoples' informal sex education, since it is increasingly pervasive in society and since there is evidence (which will be outlined shortly) to show that many young people are consuming pornography. A simple and commonly held definition of pornography is the depiction of erotic behavior intended to cause sexual excitement.[54] However, Catharine MacKinnon, a scholar, lawyer, teacher, and activist who writes a great deal about pornography, defines it as:

> the graphic sexually explicit subordination of women through pictures and/or words that also includes one or more of the following: (i) women are presented dehumanized as sexual objects, things, or commodities; or (ii) women are presented as sexual objects who enjoy pain or humiliation; or (iii) women are presented as sexual objects who experience sexual pleasure in being raped; or (iv) women are presented as sexual objects tied up or cut up or mutilated or bruised or physically hurt; or (v) women are presented in postures of sexual submission, servility or display; or (vi) women's body parts-including but not limited to vaginas, breasts, and buttocks-are exhibited, such that women are reduced to those parts; or (vii) women are presented as whores by nature; or (viii) women are presented being penetrated by objects or animals; or (ix) women are presented in scenarios of degradation, injury, torture, shown as filthy or inferior, bleeding, bruised or hurt in a context that makes these conditions sexual.[55]

This definition is useful in that it explains the many ways in which women are portrayed in pornographic videos and images. However, the definition is restricted to women, and does not account for trans and non-binary individuals, queer men, and other individuals with marginalized sexuality and gender identities. There is not much data to show the demographics of those who act in the porn industry, but 12 percent of respondents of the 2015 Transgender Survey indicated that they engaged in sex work for income during their lifetime, which includes pornography.[56] It

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[54] "Pornography." Merriam-Webster. Accessed December 16, 2016. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pornography.

[55] Catharine A. MacKinnon, "Pornography, Civil Rights, and Speech," 20.1 Harv. C.R.-C.L. L. Rev. 1, 70 (1985)

[56] Sandy E. James, Jody L. Herman, Susan Rankin, Mara Keisling, Lisa Mottet, and Ma'ayan Anafi, *The Report of the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey*, report, Washington, DC: National Center for Transgender Equality, 2016

is likely that there are a large number of trans, non-binary, and queer individuals who also experience the negative effects of pornography's representations. For the purposes of this paper, MacKinnon's definition of pornography will be expanded to include the above representations of not just women, but of non-binary, trans, and queer individuals.

***What We Know About Young People and Porn***

Sex education in schools is clearly not the only place that young people encounter sex. There is ample evidence that young people begin watching porn before high school. A number of news outlets and anti-porn advocates cite the unreliable statistic that the average young boy sees pornography for the first time at 11 years old. However, a more reliable study found that the vast majority (87%) of youth report looking for sexual images online at age 14 or over, when it is developmentally appropriate to be sexually curious.[57] A survey commissioned by the United Kingdom's BBC found that among 1,002 young people age 16-21, about one in four said they watched internet porn by the age of 12. While one third of respondents said they came across pornography by accident, the rest claimed that they intentionally used porn to answer questions they had about sex. This survey also revealed a distinct gender difference in porn viewing habits. While 1 in 5 of the young women questioned said that they had never seen pornography, only 4 percent of the young men questioned answered the same way.[58] This seems to indicate that there are more young men than women who are turning to pornography to learn about sex and romantic relationships, however it is important to note that this self-reported gender difference

[57] Michelle L. Ybarra and Kimberly J. Mitchell, "Exposure to Internet Pornography among Children and Adolescents: A National Survey," *CyberPsychology & Behavior* 8, no. 5 (2005): 473-86. doi:10.1089/cpb.2005.8.473.

[58] Heather Saul, "Porn Seen by a Quarter of Children Under 12, Survey Finds," The Independent, http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/news/porn-seen-by-a-quarter-of-children-under-12-survey-finds-9251019.html.

reflects the fears that many young women may have about admitting they have used pornography, given that many cultures slut-shame and stigmatize female sexuality and desire.[59]

If there are a substantial portion of young people who are watching porn or are exposed to it by other means, what effect does it have on them? There are debates among researchers about the true effect of porn on young people, though most researchers focus on the impacts that porn has on young men, since they report watching porn more frequently. Unfortunately, focusing mostly on young men is an approach which has many limitations. There are some scholars, like psychologist William Pollack, who express concern that the boys are learning what girls "should" look like from hard core porn, which is problematic. Phillip Zimbardo, the psychologist famous for the Stanford Prison Experiment, explained that boys' brains are being rewired to seek novelty, constant arousal, and high-speed change.[60] Simon Lajuenesse makes the argument that while many young boys are watching porn, they "said they supported gender quality and felt victimized by rhetoric demonizing pornography." The boys in this study disregarded what they found offensive, and Lajuenesse argues that adult men who sexually assault do not commit these violent acts as a result of pornography usage. He says, "you would just have to show heterosexual films to a homosexual to change his sexual orientation."[61] There are a few problems with Lajuenesse's argument. First, he assumes that it is only adult men who sexually assault. In fact, 24% of perpetrators are under the age of 20.[62] Secondly, by comparing perpetrators of sexual violence to gay individuals, he assumes that all perpetrators of sexual violence have a biological predisposition to sexually assault, which has not been proven.

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[59] Shira Tarrant, *The Pornography Industry: What Everyone Needs to Know*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016, 148.
[60] Shira Tarrant, *The Pornography Industry*, 152.
[61] "Are the Effects of Pornography Negligible?," EurekAlert! December 1, 2009, https://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2009-12/uom-ate120109.php
[62] Michael Planty and Lynn Langton, *Female Victims of Sexual Violence, 1994-2010*.

Perpetrators do not commit acts of sexual violence because of an uncontrollable sexual urge, but rather to exert power and control over another individual.[63] It is far more likely that perpetrators are impacted by their socialization, and that it cannot be *only* biology that causes a rapist to rape.

A study of 16-to-18-year-old youth published in *The Journal of Sex Research* found that not only do many teens frequently watch porn in schools, but that pressure to make or to imitate pornography was an element of some unhealthy dating relationships.[64] This shows that contrary to Lajeunesse's claim, what young people watch does influence their actions. Another scholar, Michael Flood, argues that while pornography may not be the cause of sexism, it normalizes unhealthy relationship behavior. Flood also says that the context in which teens watch porn really matters, and that factors like a young person's education or family life can influence the way young viewers interpret and analyze the pornography they are viewing.[65] Thus, young people growing up without the tools to understand healthy versus unhealthy relationship behavior may be more likely to experience the negative effects of porn. The possible effects include but are not limited to a hypersexualized view of women and girls, an expectation of masculine sexual conquest, the normalization of nonconsensual sex, and generally misguided expectations about bodies, sexuality, and sexual pleasure.[66]

In her book *Pornland,* Gail Dines, a vocal anti-porn advocate, questions the real-world implications of pornography. Dines argues that just as fashion ads, political campaigns, and other media influence culture, so does porn. She notes not only the sexist representations in porn, but

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[63] Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975.
[64] Emily Rothman, Courtney Kaczmarsky, Nina Burke, Emily Jansen, and Allyson Baughman, ""Without Porn … I Wouldn't Know Half the Things I Know Now": A Qualitative Study of Pornography Use Among a Sample of Urban, Low-Income, Black and Hispanic Youth," *The Journal of Sex Research* 52, no. 7 (2014): 736-46, doi:10.1080/00224499.2014.960908
[65] Michael Flood, "The Harms of Pornography Exposure among Children and Young People," *Child Abuse Review* 18, no. 6 (2009): 384-400. doi:10.1002/car.1092.
[66] Shira Tarrant, *The Pornography Industry,* 149.

also the racist representations in porn as well, because women of color are frequently portrayed as being submissive or powerless to white men. When it comes to the question of "does porn lead to rape," Dines notes that there is no one image or video that could lead a non-rapist to rape. Instead, she argues that "taken together, pornographic images create a world that is at best inhospitable to women, and at worst dangerous to their physical and emotional well-being." She argues that instead of asking whether porn leads people to rape, we should be asking how the messages from porn shape society's reality and culture. Dines calls for a counter ideology to porn; an ideology that could interrupt and disrupt the sexist and fabricated worldview that porn creates.[67] While sex education itself might not be enough to disrupt the ideology of the porn industry, it could be a start. However, without sufficient resources, sex education will not be powerful enough to counteract some of the harmful consequences of pornography.

***Economics of the Porn Industry***

While it is relatively easy to determine the amount of funding that different sex education programs in schools receive, calculating the worth of the porn industry is not a simple task. However, it is clear that there is more money in the porn industry than in sex education programs. Two often repeated figures are that cumulatively, people spend a total of $3000 every second on internet porn and that revenues from the porn industry surpasses that of Microsoft, Google, Amazon, eBay, Yahoo, Apple, and Netflix combined. However, understanding the revenue of the porn industry is much more complicated than that, considering record keeping tends to be sloppy and that there are multiple revenue streams that fall under the pornography umbrella. Melissa Harris Perry gave one of the more accurate—though imprecise—

[67] Gail Dines, *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality*, Boston: Beacon Press, 2010, 83-85

measurements of the worth of the porn industry. She reported on MSNBC that the porn industry garnered somewhere between $5 and $12 billion a year.[68]

In her book *Pornland,* Gail Dines notes that the global porn industry was worth about $96 billion in 2006 with the U.S. market worth $13 billion. Furthermore, she notes that the monetary value of the porn industry is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to its power. Not only does the porn industry have substantial revenue on its own, but its money and its influence is tied to other very powerful industries. According to Dines, the porn industry has accelerated the development of new technologies and business models like video streaming, internet subscriptions, online advertising techniques, and more. Some other industries – like the hotel industry—depend on porn for part of their revenue. Thus, the porn industry has powerful allies in mainstream finance, business, media, and communications chains. Slowly, porn has weaved its way into national and international markets and has consequently gained more political and legislative influence.[69] This makes it much harder to influence porn's content and hold the industry accountable, especially considering one company, MindGeek, owns eight of the ten major porn websites.[70] This means that one company, with a lot of economic and political influence, is under very little scrutiny regarding its content and its business practices.

The money and power of the porn industry stand in stark contrast to the funding and power of sex education programs. While the porn industry is estimated to be worth between $5 and $13 billion a year, sex education has only ever received funding in the millions. There are more barriers to receiving funding for sex education in public schools than in the porn industry, and if money is power, porn might have more influence on American culture than the sex

[68] Shira Tarrant, *The Pornography Industry, 42*
[69] Gail Dines, *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality*, 47
[70] Joe Pinsker, "The Hidden Economics of Porn," *The Atlantic*, April 4, 2016

education students learn in school. And if porn really is having a negative influence on teens' perceptions of healthy relationships, the institution of sex education as it stands today is not powerful enough to counteract it.

***Expert Opinions on Media and Pornography's Impact on Young People***

Most of the experts that I interviewed agreed that media was likely the number one source of information for young people about sex and intimate relationships. Nanci Coppola believes that many students come in to sex education classes with a substantial amount of misinformation from the media. She sites popular culture as a primary source of misinformation about sex and intimate relationships, and believes that media literacy is a necessary component of sex education. Vernacchio agrees that media literacy is important and says, "I would certainly feel like I failed if [my students] left my class and weren't able to notice what messages are being conveyed trough media, through the movies they are watching, and through the websites they are visiting. So much of good sex education these days is media literacy because so much information is conveyed that way." Zimmerman tends to agree as well, saying that "screens" are the main source of sex education for young people. By screens, Zimmerman means phones, TVs, laptops, etc. While Al Vernacchio believes that both friends and media are probably the main sources of information, Zimmerman notes that today, young people communicate with their friends via screens. So while students might go to their friends with questions about sex and intimacy, they could very likely be communicating via texting, iMessage, Facebook messenger, Snapchat, and other online sources. But then the question comes back to this –where did those friends get their information? Is there a strong oral tradition of sharing information about sex? Or are some students learning about sex via internet searches, porn, and popular culture and then conveying those messages to their friends?

Vernacchio says that a large number of other students who take his class come in with ideas about sex and intimacy that originated from sources that are biased by sexism, power and privilege, the denial of pleasure, or just inaccurate information (for example, inaccurate information about the way women's bodies work, about what's more likely to help women to achieve orgasm, and about what mutual pleasure looks like). Vernacchio says that since there is not enough comprehensive sexuality education in schools that focus on things like consent and pleasure, many students go to websites that don't have a very high reliability rate and have not been peer reviewed or verified in any way. Vernacchio says that another generally problematic source of information is pornography, which all the other experts mentioned as well.

Zimmerman notes that if we define sex education as anything that systematically socialized the young, then porn is sex education. While Zimmerman is not surprised that so many young people watch it, he views porn as very harmful sex education, since he believes that the vast majority of it is misogynistic, highly unrealistic, and sends all sorts of invidious messages about what love is and about what sex is. Johnson tends to agree, adding the idea that pornographic and sexually explicit images are everywhere, from the internet to signs for strip clubs to an ad in the back of the Sunday paper. Coppola notes that many young people actually stumble upon porn accidentally and that while some may seek it out, many are exposed involuntarily. Coppola explains that until relatively recently, if a student wanted to see the White House's website for whatever reason, but typed in ".com" instead of ".gov," they were directed to a pornography website. So whether intentionally or unintentionally, young people are being exposed to porn at increasingly higher rates, mostly due to technology.

Nina Hartley, a relatively famous pornographic actress, had a lot to say about pornography and its influence on society and young people specifically. What makes Hartley

different from other porn actresses is that she believes in combining sex entertainment and sex education. Before Hartley became a porn actress, she went to school for nursing. She believes that in our culture, sexuality is 'sick,' and she wants to do what she can to help. She has a series of instructional videos, meant to be both entertaining and educational for viewers, but she has also tried to do what she calls "stealth education" in her videos that are not explicitly educational. When she first started out, she made sure to showcase herself as someone who was happy, enthusiastic, and clearly in control when on camera. She says, "many fans wrote to me saying how much they appreciated my attitude as they did any physical attributes. That told me that men were starved for a vision of a woman who had sex because she *liked* it. Not to ball bust him, or to get money, or to be a bitch, but because she was horny, too." She explains that at the time, a woman behaving like this was revolutionary, and she believes that this type of representation—of a woman with equal power and control to men—is crucial in positive sex education.

Hartley says that her audience is mostly 18-24 year olds, and that it is clear that pornography plays a bigger role than it should in young peoples' sex education. She says, "in a sex-negative culture such as ours, we shield young people from age-appropriate discussions of sex, the body, gender roles, pleasure, etc. This stunts the normal development of values and leaves [young people] vulnerable to mis-information once puberty hits and sexual desire/curiosity is thrust to the forefront of consciousness." She says that without a firm intellectual understanding of sex as a concept and a construct, young people will have less ability to understand that porn is fantasy, and that it is not meant to be emulated or copied.

Hartley and the other experts believe that it is possible to get young people to start thinking critically about the pornography they watch. Hartley thinks that schools absolutely do

not do a sufficient job at teaching students to think critically about media—porn included— and Johnson agrees. Johnson says, "what's interesting for me as someone who has worked in sex education for a long time is that we don't talk about pornography in sex education because sex education is so controversial. We just make assumptions that [having] the pornography conversation is just making it more controversial." Johnson notes that abstinence-only educators have been able to discuss pornography more than their counterparts by using fear-based messages. Coppola notes that her program discusses pornography in a larger conversation about media literacy, but she did not go into detail about what those conversations look like.

Something interesting that has happened in the past few months, that Johnson mentioned, is a new trend of pornography websites creating pages specifically dedicated to education. A site called "PornHub" and a site called "xHamster" both recently launched pages like this. Johnson says that this shows that even pornography companies are recognizing that there needs to be some level of education for their viewers, which is a really interesting turn of events. Apparently, when Utah overwhelmingly failed to pass a comprehensive sex education bill, the website xHamster rerouted any viewers from Utah to their education page as a statement, with a pop up message that said, "Utahans consume the most porn per capita of any state, but have some of the lowest levels of sexual education. We're here to change that."[71] Johnson said that students deserve to get their sex education from schools, and not from pornography websites. She has not yet seen any reviews of these sites, and can't say for sure whether they have valid information or not, but she is skeptical of these porn sites treating issues like sexual violence and LGBTQ issues in a sensitive and proper manner.

[71] Walden, Eric, "Utah lawmakers nix comprehensive sex ed, so porn site steps in," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, February 10, 2017, accessed February 24, 2017, http://www.sltrib.com/home/4928118-155/lawmakers-nix-comprehensive-sex-ed-so

Dr. Laurie Betito, a clinical psychologist who specializes in sexuality, was one of the individuals behind PornHub's new education website. She described it as "a sexual wellness site, choc full of information from professionals—doctors, researchers, therapists and other specialists." She says that the site provides accurate information to visitors of PornHub and that she and individuals from PornHub worked to develop the site together because she was looking to spread knowledge and PornHub was "looking for a community project to get involved in." Betito agrees with the other experts that young people could easily turn to porn for information and end up with an inaccurate and problematic view of sex and relationships, and that right now, most schools are not doing enough to address this.

Fortunately, there are individuals like Al Vernacchio who are having discussions with students about pornography and other sexually explicit media that are not fear-based. Vernacchio says that a lot of young people who watch porn might be absorbing messages about sex and relationships unintentionally. He says, "some of them are just consuming [porn] because they like watching it and they are not aware of the carryover it might have." While he doesn't believe that all porn is destructive, and that it can be a great tool for fantasy, he says that when it is a young person's only source of information and they do not have the skills to think critically about it, it can be problematic. Vernacchio compared learning about sex through pornography to learning about driving from the film "The Fast and the Furious." He says that he challenges his students to think about the way someone recording themselves or being filmed could change the way the individuals on screen behave, and that this makes porn very different from reality where most of the time, people are not filming their sexual activity.

Vernacchio's conversations about pornography start with a foundational understanding of sex and consent that is nuanced and quite different from what might be portrayed in popular

media or in online sources that teens go to for information. Vernacchio says, "our definition of having sex in America is largely defined by either having vaginal intercourse or anal intercourse with a penis. A lot of kids just come in with an assumption that that's what sex is. And when you start deconstructing that and realizing that it's an entirely mechanical definition that's all about what action happens but says nothing about consent, pleasure, mutuality, connection or equity, they begin to really see it in a different way." Vernacchio says that when he approaches the topic of pornography under different premises of what "sex" means, students are able to think much more critically about what they are viewing; they are aware of biases and gendered power dynamics. My survey sought to explore pornography's impact on young people and whether or not their sex education discussed pornography, and the results of this portion of the survey are outlined below.

***Results About Pornography from My Survey on Sex Education and Intimate Relationships***

Before administering my survey, I hypothesized that sex education was not teaching students how to critically look at media and pornography, but that media and pornography were having a negative impact on young peoples' view of intimate relationships. While I was not able to prove through my research that pornography negatively impacts perceptions of intimate relationships, my survey did show a correlation between porn usage and having more power than a partner in an intimate relationship. Because more men than women watched porn, more men than women experienced having more power in a relationship, and men are more frequently the perpetrators of sexual violence[72], this correlation between porn usage and having more power in a relationship could potentially have something to do with the perpetration of violence, though

[72] Michelle C. Black, Kathleen C. Basile, Matthew K. Breiding, Sharon G. Smith, et al., *National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010 Summary Report,* p. 24

my research cannot explicitly show this. However, my survey did show that a large number of young people are watching porn, but are not discussing it in their sex education courses.

While Vernacchio definitely discusses pornography in his sex education courses, many other sex education courses do not discuss this topic. When asked if respondents discussed pornography in their sex education class, the majority (63.77%) said no. Students in AOUME or Abstinence-Plus programs were more likely than their counterparts in Comprehensive Sex Education (CSE) programs to have discussed porn. While 21.62% of respondents who had CSE said that they discussed pornography in their sex education class, 36.36% of respondents who had Abstinence-Plus and 38.46% of respondents who had AOUME said that they discussed pornography in their sex education class. This is consistent with what Shelagh Johnson said about the topic of pornography in sex education, and she noted that the messages about pornography in AOUME and Abstinence-Plus programs were probably-fear based. So, even though the conversation is happening, it might not be sending the right message.

There was a full section of the survey devoted to understanding respondents' pornography viewing habits and what impact—if any—porn has on their perception of intimate relationships. Obviously, as with any portion of this survey, there could be self-report bias due to the sensitivity of this subject. Overall, my survey found that a majority of young people watched porn before age 18 and since turning 18, and that there is a correlation between porn usage and the feeling of having more power in a relationship.

Delving a little deeper, the majority (63.31%) of the 18-24 year olds surveyed said that they watched porn before the age of 18, three quarters (75.54%) of the respondents said that they have watched porn since turning 18, and 55.4% said that they currently watch porn. For each of these questions, fewer than 6% of respondents said that they did not feel comfortable answering

these questions. There was a gender discrepancy in these answers, and more men than women said they watched porn at any age. While 59.09% of men compared to 38.64% of women watched porn before the age of 18, there was a bit less of a discrepancy among those who watched porn since turning 18. Since turning 18, 54.29% of men indicated that they watched porn and 43.81% of women indicated that they had watched porn.

When asked "how much does porn influence your perspective on sex and/or healthy relationships," about two thirds (66.91%) of respondents said that it does not or has never influenced them, 18.71% of respondents said that it influences them somewhat, and 2.16% of respondents said that it influences them a lot. However, when respondents were asked in a later section of the survey to rank different sources of information based on how much information and how much relevant information they received from these sources, some individuals who said that porn did not influence them at all ranked pornography relatively high. This means that there was probably some self-report bias in respondents' answers to the question of how much porn influenced them.

The individuals who said that pornography did influence them were able to provide additional explanation, and many did. The responses are recorded in Table 6. Many respondents said that pornography teaches them about the types of activities they would like to try with an intimate partner, or makes them want for certain types of activities. This shows that while people might use pornography as a tool for fantasy, it does impact the types of experiences people would like to have in real life. Some acknowledged that they try to separate pornography from real life, but others did not. Many individuals indicated that they had watched rough sex. There was an even split of people responding that they had or had not watched porn that depicted rough

sex (47.48% for each). Far fewer respondents said that they had watched porn that depicted nonconsensual sex, with 80.58% saying that they had never watched this type of pornography.

There is also an interesting correlation between a respondent having experienced an intimate relationship in which they had more power and their porn viewing habits. Of the respondents who indicated that they had been in a relationship where they felt like they had more power, 84.62% had watched porn before the age of 18 and 96.15% had watched porn since turning 18. Furthermore, 76.92% of those respondents indicated that they had watched porn that depicted "rough" sex and 30.73% had watched porn that depicted nonconsensual sex. This means that of the individuals who had indicated that they felt they had more power in a relationship, many had also been exposed to porn at a young age and specifically porn that depicted rough sex, where there are generally exaggerated power dynamics portrayed. On the other hand, among individuals who said they had experienced less power in an intimate relationship, there was a lower percentage of individuals who watched porn before 18 or since turning 18 and there was a lower percentage of individuals who had watched porn that depicted rough or nonconsensual sex.

While the results of my survey are by no means a definitive, it is clear that there are a lot of young people watching porn, and that whether they report an influence or not, pornography has had some influence on them. The correlation between porn viewing habits and power in a relationship is one that should be fleshed out further in future studies. Many experts and scholars have correctly noted that watching porn once is not going to turn a non-rapist into a rapist, but this correlation suggests that porn is normalizing unbalanced power dynamics in intimate relationships, which can *sometimes* lead to sexual violence and abuse.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Before conducting my research, I theorized that while young people view sex education in schools as a source of relevant information about sex, intimate relationships, and sexual violence, sex education is not adequately teaching about these topics. I believed that while Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Education may send the most problematic messages to young people about sexual violence, that comprehensive sex education was not entirely perfect either. My theory was that sex education did not do enough to teach young people how to deconstruct myths about sexual violence and to critically consume media and pornography (which I believed had a generally negative impact on young people's view of intimate relationships), and that a lack of federal funding and a lack of policies promoting sexual violence prevention and education were partially at fault. Overall, my research supported my hypotheses, and showed some interesting correlations that I was not explicitly looking for as well.

The reason that I initially chose to conduct research on this topic was because I believed that current sexual violence prevention efforts were too concentrated on college campuses and were neglecting individuals who do not attend college or who experience sexual violence before they are eighteen years old. Statistics have supported the notion that individuals under the age of 18 and individuals who are college-aged but do not attend college are very likely—and in some cases more likely than their college-going peers—to have experienced sexual violence. The results from my survey supports those statistics, and suggests that potentially a larger percentage of survivors than previously acknowledged has experienced violence before the age of 18. This means that violence prevention efforts absolutely cannot start in college, and that it is crucial to look for resources that can teach young people about sexual violence prevention early on. While not all young people use sex education in schools as their primary source of information about

sex, intimate relationships, and sexual violence, a large portion do. More respondents ranked sex education in schools as one of their top three sources for where the get the most and the most relevant information about sex and intimate relationships than any other source. The sources that were the next most cited locations for sex education were intimate partners and parents. Unfortunately, because the second and third highest ranked sources are other people, the information that they relay will be entirely based on where *they* got their sex education growing up. It is particularly troubling that so many young people learn from their intimate partners, since some of those intimate partners are abusive and perpetrate violence themselves. This makes it even more imperative that all young people learn about these topics at a young age, so that they can become conditioned to look critically at aspects of American culture that help perpetuate and normalize sexual violence.

While there are pornography websites and texting services and other creative outlets that people are using to reach young people in a new way and educate them about sex, K-12 school is probably the most universal experience among American youth, and now there is some evidence from my survey to show that young people do look to sex education for reliable and helpful information. While young people get information that they perceive as relevant from school-based sex education, this education is not being taught to its fullest potential. Sex education in schools could be used as a site for violence prevention efforts if done correctly. Unfortunately, as it stands, most sex education in schools is not only failing at being a catalyst for positive change, but it is potentially doing harm by not addressing very basic facets of sexual violence and sexual violence prevention work, which allows students to continue believing myths that they learn from sources that contribute to rape culture (for example, the myth that what a person wears or influence from drugs or alcohol makes it partially their fault if they experience sexual violence).

Far too few survey respondents were able to deconstruct common myths about sexual violence, and far too few survey respondents said that their sex education provided them with tools to understand and help a survivor of sexual violence. Only a little bit more than half of survey respondents knew that an "uncontrollable sexual urge" is not the cause of rape. Under half of survey respondents knew what to do if someone they knew disclosed that they had experienced sexual violence. Most tragically is the fact that close to two-thirds of survivors who sat through sex education in high school said that it didn't help them understand or cope with their experience at all. This situation should be remediated.

There are many factors that contribute to the inadequacy of most sex education programs. Firstly, there is an incredible lack of funding and prioritization among federal, state, and local governments for sex education that addresses sexual violence. The Every Student Succeeds Act is the first piece of federal legislation to provide funding for violence prevention, but it is so vague that many local agencies can interpret the law and use the funding for programs that promote abstinence as the only way for young people to maintain a healthy sexuality. As Jonathan Zimmerman, Shelagh Johnson, and Al Vernacchio emphasized, it is impossible to do true violence prevention work without acknowledging that teens are sexually active, and abstinence-only education does not acknowledge that teens are sexually active. My survey results also made evident the fact that AOUME and Abstinence-Plus education is not doing an adequate job of teaching about sexual violence. Even though survey respondents who had those types of education learned about healthy relationships, abusive relationships, and sexual assault and rape at higher rates than their peers who had comprehensive sex education, they answered the fact-based questions about those topics incorrectly at the highest rates. This proves that just because a program claims that it teaches about healthy relationships and sexual violence and uses

buzz words like "communication skills," "boundary setting," and "negotiation" does not mean that it is adequately teaching young people about sexual violence and prevention. But while young people who completed abstinence-based programs answered the fact-based questions correctly at the lowest rates, respondents who learned via comprehensive sex education did not overwhelmingly answer the questions correctly either. Abstinence-based programs might be the worst off, but comprehensive sex education programs are clearly not doing a good enough job either, probably because most of them are focused almost exclusively on pregnancy prevention and STI and HIV/AIDS prevention.

Another reason that sex education in schools is not up to par is because of who is teaching it and how they are teaching it. The majority of survey respondents said that a general health or gym teacher taught them sex education, but many of these teachers are not passionate about nor dedicated to teaching these topics. While there are plenty of people who go to school specifically to become sexuality educators, schools either choose not to or cannot hire them because of funding restrictions and other priorities. This is partially the government's fault as well, since school funding plays a role in a school's hiring capabilities and since school funding is dictated by federal, state, and local governments. The exception here would be private schools, where it was clear that the quality of sex education was better. However, across both the public and private school landscape, teachers are only discussing topics related to sexual violence prevention for a very short time. Most survey respondents said that they spent under two class periods discussing these issues, and it is very unlikely that a few hours of sex education a year—or worse, two hours of sex education over many years—can overcome the influence of thousands of hours of media consumption a year.

Another reason that sex education right now is not doing enough is because sex education is not explicitly addressing the issues of media and pornography consumption. Though they may not have ranked these sources as the *most* relevant, there are many young people who use internet searches, pornography, and movies as sources of information about intimate relationships and sex. Many of the messages that young people receive from these media are misogynistic and unrealistic, yet most sex education does not help students view these media with a critical eye. The majority of survey respondents did not discuss pornography in their sex education classes, and the ones who did were mostly in AOUME and Abstinence-Plus classes that likely relayed fear based messages. Furthermore, Americans are currently experiencing a moment where the President of the United States has said violent and misogynistic things about women, and has sexual assault allegations against him. When a figure like the President—who many children learn they should respect or look up to as a role model—is someone who perpetrates violence themselves, it becomes even more urgent for young people to have the skills to view facts critically and recognize harmful behaviors. Young people need to be able to look at media analytically, so that this behavior does not become further normalized by the fact that someone who is perpetrator of sexual violence was able to rise to the most powerful occupation in the world.

Moving forward, there are many ways in which sex education could improve. Firstly, it is essential that not only do schools have funding to implement effective violence prevention programs, but that they are held accountable to teaching curriculum that acknowledges the realities of young peoples' lives. It will be important for advocates and policymakers who care about sexual violence prevention to push for bills like Michigan's *Revised School Code,* which is explicit in its definition of affirmative consent and sexual violence education.

Gaining a deeper understanding of where and how young people learn about intimate relationships and sexual violence was an important first step in understanding where to focus reforms. Since it is clear that sex education in schools does reach students, it is now important to shine an even brighter light on formal sex education. This paper only superficially addressed the curricular elements of sex education in schools, and a very important next step will be to find out what curriculum schools across the country are using and develop curricula that meets the standards of a quality sexual violence prevention education. This will not be an easy task, since obtaining this information requires reaching out to individual school districts in most cases, but it is something that advocates on the state level should begin doing. Once we know what schools are teaching, it will then be important to have some sort of metric by which to assess these programs and to hold schools accountable to reaching certain standards. What does the perfect curriculum look like? Once the answer to that question is known, barriers like funding and political ideology might incredibly hard to work around in terms of implementing that curriculum, but sexual violence is an issue that cuts across racial, socioeconomic, and partisan lines, and should be prioritized more than it currently is.

Sexual violence is pervasive in our society—particularly for women, young people, people of color, queer, and trans individuals—and while it is not an easy problem to tackle, Band-Aid solutions are not the answer anymore. Focusing the majority of funding and efforts on college campuses can only reach a certain population of people, and can only go so far in preventing sexual violence if young people grow up in and are conditioned to a culture that normalizes, perpetuates, and encourages sexual violence. Sexual violence prevention efforts must start at a younger age, and must provide young people with the tools to view the world critically and with an awareness of the power dynamics and institutions that allow sexual

violence to continue occurring. Ending sexual and gender-based violence is a difficult and daunting task, and there are so many questions that still need to be answered, but the work starts here.

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**APPENDIX A: Section 4108 of ESSA**

Section 4108—Activities to Support Safe and Healthy Students

Subject to section 4106(f), each local educational agency, or consortium of such agencies, that receives an allocation under section 4105

(a) shall use a portion of such funds to develop, implement, and evaluate comprehensive programs and activities that—

(1) are coordinated with other schools and community-based services and programs;

(2) foster safe, healthy, supportive, and drug-free environments that support student academic achievement;

(3) promote the involvement of parents in the activity or program;

(4) may be conducted in partnership with an institution of higher education, business, nonprofit organization, community-based organization, or other public or private entity with a demonstrated record of success in implementing activities described in this section; and

(5) may include, among other programs and activities—

(A) drug and violence prevention activities and programs that are evidence-based (to the extent the State, in consultation with local educational agencies in the State, determines that such evidence is reasonably available) including—

(I) programs to educate students against the use of alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, smokeless tobacco products, and electronic cigarettes; and

(ii) professional development and training for school and specialized instructional support personnel and interested community members in prevention, education, early identification, intervention mentoring, recovery support services and, where appropriate, rehabilitation referral, as related to drug and violence prevention;

(B) in accordance with sections 4001 and 4111—

(I) school-based mental health services, including early identification of mental health symptoms, drug use, and violence, and appropriate referrals to direct individual or group counseling services, which may be provided by school-based mental health services providers; and

(ii) school-based mental health services partnership programs that—

(I) are conducted in partnership with a public or private mental health entity or health care entity; and

(II) provide comprehensive school-based mental health services and supports and staff development for school and community personnel working in the school that are—

(aa) based on trauma-informed practices that are evidence-based (to the extent the State, in consultation with local educational agencies in the

State, determines that such evidence is reasonably available);

(bb) coordinated (where appropriate) with early intervening services provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1400 et seq.); and

(cc) provided by qualified mental and behavioral health professionals who are certified or licensed by the State involved and practicing within their area of expertise;

(C) programs or activities that—

(I) integrate health and safety practices into school or athletic programs;

(ii) support a healthy, active lifestyle, including nutritional education and regular, structured physical education activities and programs, that may address chronic disease management with instruction led by school nurses, nurse practitioners, or other appropriate specialists or professionals to help maintain the well-being of students;

(iii) help prevent bullying and harassment;

(iv) improve instructional practices for developing relationship-building skills, such as effective communication, and improve safety through the recognition and prevention of coercion, violence, or abuse, including teen and dating violence, stalking, domestic abuse, and sexual violence and harassment;

(v) provide mentoring and school counseling to all students, including children who are at risk of academic failure, dropping out of school, involvement in criminal or delinquent activities, or drug use and abuse;

(vi) establish or improve school dropout and reentry programs; or (

vii) establish learning environments and enhance students' effective learning skills that are essential for school readiness and academic success, such as by providing integrated systems of student and family supports;

(D) high-quality training for school personnel, including specialized instructional support personnel, related to—

(I) suicide prevention;

(ii) effective and trauma-informed practices in classroom management;

(iii) crisis management and conflict resolution techniques;

(iv) human trafficking (defined, for purposes of this subparagraph, as an act or practice described in paragraph (9) or (10) of section 103 of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (22 U.S.C. 7102));

(v) school-based violence prevention strategies;

(vi) drug abuse prevention, including educating children facing substance abuse at home; and

(vii) bullying and harassment prevention;

(E) in accordance with sections 4001 and 4111, child sexual abuse awareness and prevention programs or activities, such as programs or activities designed to provide—

(I) age-appropriate and developmentally-appropriate instruction for students in child sexual abuse awareness and prevention, including how to recognize child sexual abuse and how to safely report child sexual abuse; and

(ii) information to parents and guardians of students about child sexual abuse awareness and prevention, including how to recognize child sexual abuse and how to discuss child sexual abuse with a child;

(F) designing and implementing a locally-tailored plan to reduce exclusionary discipline practices in elementary and secondary schools that—

(I) is consistent with best practices;

(ii) includes strategies that are evidence-based (to the extent the State, in consultation with local educational agencies in the State, determines that such evidence is reasonably available); and

(iii) is aligned with the long-term goal of prison reduction through opportunities, mentoring, intervention, support, and other education services, referred to as a ''youth PROMISE plan''; or

(G) implementation of schoolwide positive behavioral interventions and supports, including through coordination with similar activities carried out under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1400 et seq.), in order to improve academic outcomes and school conditions for student learning;

(H) designating a site resource coordinator at a school or local educational agency to provide a variety of services, such as—

(I) establishing partnerships within the community to provide resources and support for schools;

(ii) ensuring that all service and community partners are aligned with the academic expectations of a community school in order to improve student success; and

(iii) strengthening relationships between schools and communities; or

(I) pay for success initiatives aligned with the purposes of this section.

**APPENDIX B: Tables**

| TABLE 1: Experiences of Sexual Violence by Age, Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Educational Attainment | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Percentage of individuals who personally experienced rape, sexual assault, stalking, and/or relationship abuse (including sexual abuse, physical abuse, economic abuse, and/or emotional abuse) | Percentage of individuals who have NOT personally experienced rape, sexual assault, stalking, and/or relationship abuse (including sexual abuse, physical abuse, economic abuse, and/or emotional abuse) |
| **Gender** | Men | 15.15% | 84.85% |
| | Women | 41.43% | 55.71% |
| | Transgender | 100%[73] | 0% |
| | Genderqueer, nonbinary, agender/neutrois, or genderfluid | 16.67% | 83.33% |
| **Age** | Before 18 | 75.61% | 24.39% |
| **Race** | American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, or other Pacific Islander | 0% | 100% |
| | Asian | 16.67% | 83.33% |
| | Black or African American | 19.05% | 80.95% |
| | Hispanic or Latinx | 27.27% | 73.73% |
| | White | 35.63% | 63.22% |
| | Multiracial | 50% | 33.33%[74] |
| **Sexuality** | Heterosexual (straight) | 26.05% | 73.95% |
| | Gay, Lesbian, Pansexual, Bisexual, Asexual, or Queer | 36.36% | 63.64% |
| **Enrollment in a Post-** | Currently or previously | 30.30% | 68.68% |

[73] There was only one transgender respondent
[74] There were some respondents who were unsure or did not feel comfortable answering this question

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Secondary Institution** | enrolled in a post-secondary institution | | |
| | Never enrolled in a post-secondary institution | 27.5% | 70% |
| **TOTAL:** | | **29.5%** | **69.06%** |

| **TABLE 2: Survey Respondents' Explanations About Why They Did/Did Not Report Experiences with Sexual Violence to an Authority** |
|---|
| Did not report because it wasn't severe enough |
| I went to counseling to help me get through |
| I was never in any physical danger |
| My mom reported it |
| I told my mom and she handled the situation. I did not need or feel comfortable going to the police |
| What happened was certainly unconsensual and a grievance, but I didn't feel threatened in the long or short term, just annoyed |
| I was not entirely aware that I was being emotionally abused until the relationship was over. When I did realize it, I recognized and accepted it and vowed to never let it happen again and be aware of the signs. |
| I was told to report once I told school counselor |
| Too scared |
| I was too afraid to. I was too ashamed to tell anyone. I felt like if I didn't talk about it it never happened to me. I blocked a lot of it out of my mind. I think that is how I could cope with it. |
| I was young and didn't know it was wrong or what had been done. It wasn't until I was much older that I remembered it all. By that time the person was long gone. |
| There was a guy I met in college via Tinder who tried to force me to have sex with him. It really scared me, but I didn't report it to authorities because I felt like I handled the situation and also didn't think that there was anything they could do. |
| I immediately reported it to my mom, who contacted authorities, however, nothing was done and I was treated like a liar. |
| I was very young when I was molested and didn't realize what happened and that it was wrong until freshman year when I talked to a counselor. My counselor broke confidentiality and told my mom so I ended up telling my parents about it. It was years later and we are no longer associated with that person. |
| They did nothing |
| I thought I loved him and things would change, and after a while I got too scared to leave. |
| I was too young to report it myself |
| I didn't understand what had happened and I thought that I would get into trouble. |
| I didn't because I thought it would make me look weak. I used to be involved in a verbally and slightly physically abusive relationship. |

| |
|---|
| I didn't feel like it was a huge deal. It would be more trouble to report than to just move on. |
| Fear of stigma and being told I was "overreacting." |
| I told my mom about my dad physically and emotionally abusing me and she contacted the police. |
| Didn't know how to tell |
| I thought it was my fault and that no one would believe me |
| I did not feel comfortable reporting this incident because at the time I felt it was my fault since I was drinking. |

**TABLE 3: 2016 Sex Education Legislation Regarding Healthy Relationships and/or Relationship and Sexual Violence[75]**

| State | Summary of Bill[76] | Status |
|---|---|---|
| Arizona | (House and Senate bill) Requires that school districts provide sex education that is medically accurate and age appropriate in grades K-12. Creates additional requirements for sex education, including the importance of using effective contraceptives to prevent unintended pregnancy, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. Education requirements also include information to support students in developing healthy relationships and skills such as communication, critical thinking, problem solving and decision making. Requires the Department of Education, among other things, to develop list of appropriate curricula and create rules for instructor qualifications. | Failed-Adjourned in House and Senate |
| Georgia | (House bill) Requires age-appropriate sexual abuse and assault awareness and prevention education in grades K-12. Provides that professional learning and in-service training may include programs on sexual abuse and assault awareness and prevention. | Failed-adjourned in House |
| Hawaii | (Two House bills and a Senate bill) Adds additional requirements for information that helps students form healthy relationships and communication skills, as well as critical thinking, decision making and stress management skills, and encourages students to communicate with adults. Requires all public schools to implement sex education consistent with these requirements beginning in 2016-2017. Allows written permission by parental or legal guardian to opt out of sexuality education. Allows the Department of Education to make modifications to ensure age-appropriate curricula in elementary school. Requires the Department to maintain a public list of curricula that meets requirements of law and to create standards for instructor qualifications. | Failed-adjourned in House, Failed in Senate |

[75] "State Policies on Sex Education in Schools," State Policies on Sex Education in Schools, February 16, 2016, accessed February 07, 2017, http://www.ncsl.org/research/health/state-policies-on-sex-education-in-schools.aspx
[76] Only bills and portions of bills relevant to violence prevention are included in this table

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Massachusetts | (House bill) Requires each school district or public school that offers sexual health education to provide medically accurate, age-appropriate education that teaches the benefits of abstinence and delaying sexual activity in conjunction with contraceptives and barrier methods to prevent unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS. Provides that sexual health education should help students develop the relationship and communication skills to form healthy relationships free of violence, coercion, and intimidation. Requires the school to adopt a written policy ensuring parental or legal guardian notification of the comprehensive sexual health education and the right of the parent or legal guardian to withdraw his or her child from all or part of the instruction shall be adopted. | Pending-carryover |
| Massachusetts | (Senate bill) Requires every city, town, regional school district, vocational school district or charter school with a curriculum on human sexuality to adopt a written policy ensuring parental or legal guardian notification of the comprehensive sexual health education provided by the school, the right of the parent to withdraw a student from instruction and the notification process to the school for withdrawal. Provides that sexual education shall be medically accurate, age-appropriate education that teaches the benefits of abstinence and delaying sexual activity in conjunction with contraceptives and barrier methods to prevent unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS. Also stipulates that education should help students develop the relationship and communication skills to form healthy relationships free of violence, coercion, and intimidation. Provides that the department of elementary and secondary education shall establish age-appropriate guidelines for child exploitation awareness education. | Pending-carryover |
| Michigan | (House and Senate bill) Requires that material and instruction in sex education shall teach pupils that in order for consent to be given by both parties to sexual activity it must be affirmative consent. The bill defines affirmative consent as "affirmative, conscious, and voluntary agreement to engage in sexual activity; that it is the responsibility of each individual involved in the sexual activity to ensure that he or she has the affirmative consent of the other to engage in the sexual activity; that lack of protest or resistance does not mean consent and that silence does not mean consent; that affirmative consent must be ongoing throughout a sexual activity and can be revoked at any time; and that the existence of a dating relationship between the persons involved, or the fact of past sexual relations between them, should never by itself be assumed to be an indicator of consent." | House and Senate versions pending |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Mississippi | (House bill) Requires sex-related education to consist of medically accurate comprehensive instruction or program. Requires certain teaching components including the appropriate approaches to accessing health care services related to the human reproductive system, and health complications resulting from consensual or nonconsensual sexual activity and available resources for victims of rape, sexual assault or other instances of nonconsensual sexual activity. | Failed |
| Mississippi | (Senate bill) Requires Mississippi school districts to adopt a sex education curriculum that includes medically accurate, complete, age and developmentally appropriate information and to provide information about the prevention of unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections (including HIV), dating violence, sexual assault, bullying and harassment. Stipulates that the curriculum shall promote and uphold the rights of young people to information in order to make healthy and responsible decisions about their sexual health. | Failed |
| Missouri | (House bill) Amends laws related to sex education in schools. In addition to existing criteria of medically and factually accurate, requires that curricula must also be age appropriate and based on peer review. Adds stipulations to cover certain topics, including helping students develop critical thinking, decision making, and stress management skills in order to support healthy relationships. Specifies that curricula promote communication with parents. | Failed-adjourned |
| Missouri | (Senate bill) Creates the Teen Dating Violence Prevention Education Act to provide students with the knowledge, skills, and information to prevent and respond to teen dating violence. Authorizes school districts and charter schools to provide teen dating violence education as part of the sexual health and health education program in grades seven through 12 and to establish a related curriculum or materials. Also allows age appropriate instruction on domestic violence. | Failed-adjourned |
| New York | (Assembly bill) Amends existing education law to add prevention of sexual abuse and assault to health education in all public schools. Requires instruction to be based on current practice and standards and to include recognizing, avoiding, refusing and reporting sexual abuse and assault. Establishes teacher training and standards for type of teacher who can instruct in elementary and secondary school. | Pending |
| Oklahoma | (House bill) Provides that school districts may provide programs to students in grades 7 through 12 addressing sexual violence, domestic violence, dating violence and stalking awareness and prevention. The programs may address the issue of consent to sexual activity and educate students about the affirmative | Failed-adjourned |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | consent standard. Programs may be offered as a separate program or as a part of a sex education class or program. The program outline shall be made available to the public online through the school district website. No student shall be required to participate in the program if a parent or guardian objects in writing. | |
| Pennsylvania | (Senate bill) Requires public school districts to provide sexual health education. Instruction and materials must be age appropriate and all information presented must be medically accurate. Also stipulates certain content that the sexual health education must include, such as information on sexting and affirmative consent. | Failed-adjourned |
| Utah | (House bill) Requires the state board of education to establish curriculum with instruction in comprehensive human sexuality education which includes evidence-based information about topics such as human reproduction, all methods to prevent unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases and infections (including HIV and AIDS) and sexual or physical violence. Stipulates that this curriculum shall include instruction to help students develop skills to make healthy decisions and not making unwanted verbal, physical, and sexual advances. Also provides that the curriculum shall include the information on sexual abstinence as well as increasing the use of condoms and other contraceptives. Requires that the state instructional materials commission shall consult with parents, teachers, school nurses, and community members in evaluating instructional materials for comprehensive human sexuality curriculum that comply with this section. | Failed |
| Washington | (Senate bill) Adds information on sexual assault and violence prevention and understanding consent to existing health education requirement. | Failed |

| TABLE 4: Percentage of Respondents Who Answered the Fact-Based Questions Correct by Type of Sex Education | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Question: | **% Correct from AOUME** | **% Correct from Abstinence Plus** | **% Correct from CSE** |
| Rape is caused by an uncontrollable sexual urge. (answer: FALSE) | 51.85 | 42.42 | 63.51 |
| Most sexual assaults are committed by strangers. It's not rape if the people involved know each other. (answer: FALSE) | 81.48 | 86.67 | 95.08 |
| Arguing can be a healthy part of a relationship. (answer: TRUE) | 55.56 | 48.48 | 59.46 |
| The first thing you should do if someone tells you they have been sexually assaulted/abused is ask them what happened. (answer: FALSE) | 48.15 | 48.48 | 48.65 |
| If a perpetrator of sexual assault or relationship abuse is under the influence of drugs or alcohol, they are still responsible for their actions. (answer: TRUE) | 77.78 | 90.91 | 89.19 |
| If someone who has experienced rape, sexual assault, or relationship abuse was under the influenced of drugs or alcohol at the time of this experience, it is partially their fault. (answer: FALSE) | 59.26 | 72.53 | 83.78 |

| TABLE 5: Topics Discussed in Sex Education, Organized by Type of Sex Education | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Topic: | **Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Education (AOUME)** | **Abstinence-Plus Education** | **Comprehensive Sex Education (CSE)** |
| Discussed healthy relationships | 74.07% | 69.7% | 64.86% |
| Discussed abusive relationships | 70.37% | 63.64% | 59.46% |
| Discussed sexual assault and/or rape | 62.96% | 57.58% | 58.11% |

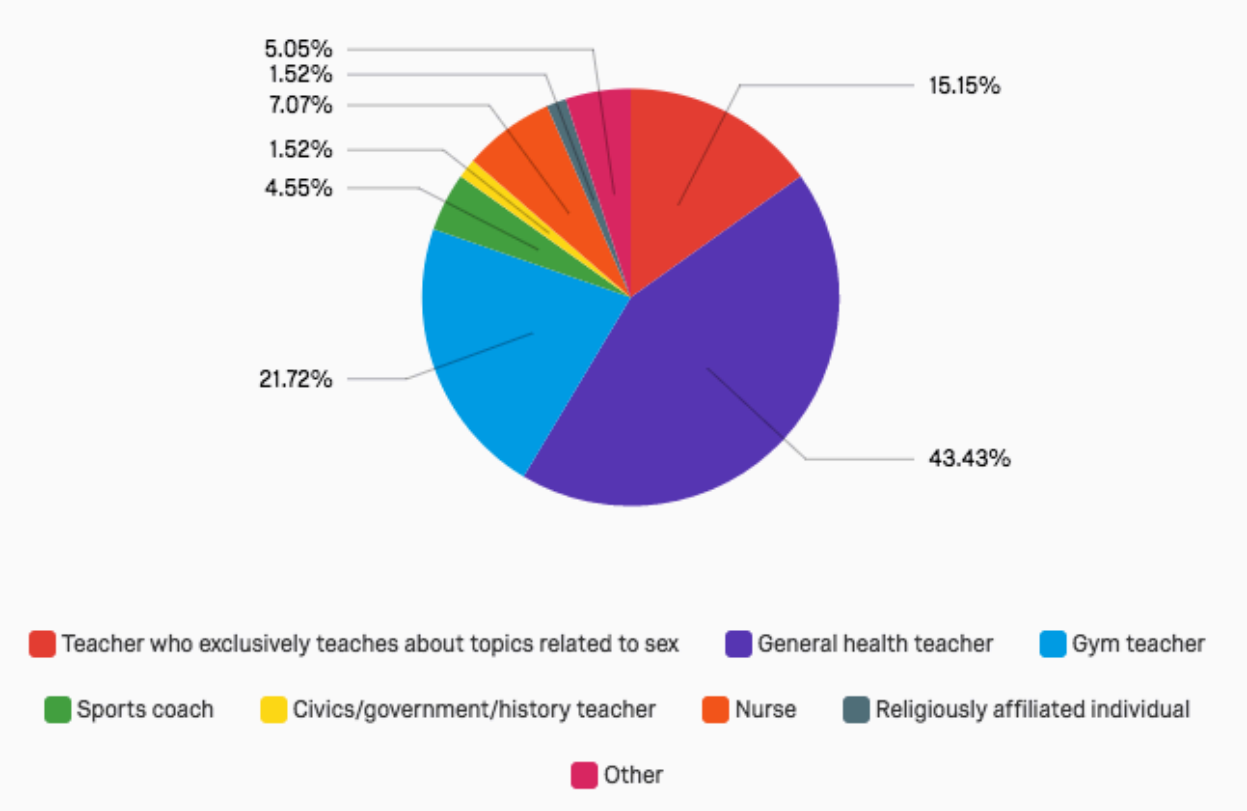
| TABLE 6: Survey Respondents' Explanations About Pornography's Influence on Their Perspectives on Sex and/or Healthy Relationships |
|---|
| I don't want to seem like a weirdo for do so, but I sometimes do use pornography. As a youth, I suppose it gave me perspective towards having sex, in a sense of how to do it, and what I looks like, but to me, sex is an act of love, to love the girl down. Porn has only ever given tips, like what girls might like, but not all girls are the same, so not all tips apply. Everything is mutual, and the tips I have learned have only ever been mutually beneficial. |
| Helps with new ideas |
| I don't think should watch porn being in a relationship |
| It gives better insight and more positions ideas |
| Sometimes it makes you wanna have sex. So yes |
| The sexual acts one's partner should perform for another |
| Good for Choke of the chicken |
| Showed me different ways to have sex so when I did, I was ready. |
| Porn has no extreme direct influence on a healthy relationship, but has made me aware that sex isn't the same for everybody. People like different things and finding out what a partner likes sexually can help make a relationship ship healthy. As well as experimenting and trying new things. |
| It influences my perspective somewhat because it shows how it can be intimate. |
| It gives a kind of satisfaction. |
| Idk just seems like it does |
| It just shows different moves that I want to experience. |
| In some ways I'm more open to try new things or learned how to please a woman. In other ways I catch myself wishing some intimate moments were more like the pornography. |
| I feel better when having sex |
| You think more about it. Your mind just doesn't feel right and sober. |
| Sadly enough, I learned more through watching porn about sex then I ever did from any sex education. The only thing we were taught was diseases, and how abstinence was key. |
| I am aware that pornography is acting and not realistic and am able to keep it separate from "real life" |
| I like to watch and try what I see |
| It makes me see ways I can use their moves next time I have sex. |
| It can change the way a man looks at any other female in everyday life |
| It shows what sex is supposed to look like. Gives you expectations. |
| I get ideas but that's it |
| The idea that the woman always reaches an orgasm, and the amount of pleasure that should be received during sex. Mostly influenced me when I was younger. |
| Want to explore as much a possible with my partners. |
| I would say it influences me in what could be done while having sex with a partner to keep things exciting/good. Though not all things in porn are healthy so one must be carful |

| TABLE 7: Additional Information Provided by Survey Respondents |
|---|
| Rape and sexual assault needs to stop |
| The difficult conversations are still not being held in an environment where the people who need to hear it will actually do so. |
| I would like to know how am I supposed to feel when someone close to be is raped? I know it is selfish to only be thinking about myself, but that is not what I mean I just want to kill the person who raped my loved ones. I feel angry and do not know how to comfort my loved ones. |
| For such a horrible act to rape someone. It's shocking to see people today still think it's okay. |
| I didn't get comprehensive sex ed at school but I got it from reading books. |
| Schools should work harder on making sure that people understand abusive relationships |
| As far as I remember sex education taught us mainly about, puberty, natural urges, STDs, and the practices of safe sex. The topic of sexual abuse was very lightly discussed, but I believe this is because the teacher did not want to offend anyone or bring up any painful memories in case it had happened to someone in the class |
| this topic is so large and we should know about it |
| People that rape others or abuse others sexually should be put to death. |
| I think unhealthy relationships do need to be talked about in high school. Because I feel that sometimes girls don't know what's healthy and what is not. |
| My grandmother was raped and raised the child. My grandfather always loved him as his own. |
| Sex information should be excluded from everywhere and age when you find out about those stuff should be higher. Childhood is being stolen. |
| The only "sex education" I received in school only taught us about what sex was and the potential STDs you can receive if you have unsafe sex. I don't recall learning about intimate relationships or sexual abuse. I do, however, remember having to watch videos about how to tell a guy "no" because they wanted to teach us that it's okay to not want to have sex with someone and not be afraid to say it. |
| I think sex education in school is not efficient enough and young people are not educated enough about safe sexual, relationship, and intimate emotional things. |
| I feel like maybe molestation should be included in your definition of sexual assault, unless it was supposed to be inferred. |
| I don't know your purpose of this survey but I want to thank you for doing it because I'm assuming it's for a positive purpose. I was sexually abused as a kid and now I can only find pleasure in "rape" like fantasies - or rough/forceful things. School did not help me at all. 90% of my information was found either online or by talking to friends or sexual partners. |
| Always let someone know what's going on, you have no idea what people will be willing to do to help. |
| I think that they should also have a way to teach the 4,5,6, &7 year olds what it is and what to do if it happens so that they can get these guys or women and also so that the child does not have to grow up being in a situation and not know what to do. |
| My university rape and assault information is extremely helpful, not so much my high school |
| I am lucky that I have never been in a situation like this. I learn most of my information on this subject from watching law and order SVU |
| I feel that sex education needs to be taught in a more serious and in depth manner in the school system, and in a way that it isn't taken lightly. |

| |
|---|
| I feel as though many people have experienced some sort of abuse but do not know that it is abuse. It seems like abuse in a relationship is kinda the norm. |
| Groping is really an issue that goes unnoticed |
| Are education system should probably teach are students better about sexual assault. I didn't really get educated about it until college. |
| I think sex education in schools can be a great thing, if the teacher is honest and open and if the students don't treat everything like a joke. I remember when I was in class it was hard to learn about sex because of other students' immaturity- the teacher did not feel comfortable talking about topics because some students would just laugh. |
| Like I said it needs to stop. Lots of people have problems wanting sex a lot |
| In retrospect, the sex education program that was taught at my school was inadequate, to say the least. It's unfortunate that most people have to learn through other, potentially unreliable sources like friends or movies. |
| I do not. I would say when it comes to sexual assault I have been lucky enough to not be in those scenarios. However, I will say that in my university community I think students share the blame by not trying to intervene in rape culture....there is no explicit intention, but the college environment tends to focus on activities that encourage sexual assault through silence |
| I find it terrifying that women can hit men and get away with it as not abuse. |
| When I was 11 a boy pressured me into kissing him. I wanted a boyfriend because I thought a boyfriend would buy me candy. I didn't enjoy kissing. |
| Most everything I have learned about sex is from books. That is because I am on the shyer side of talking about things like that with my siblings and parents. I think that how you learn about sex has a lot of influence on how you handle sexual situations in life. |
| I'm not sure I don't have much experience. But if I was I victim to rape or assault I feel it would be best to talk about it |
| I am very open about this subject now and try to use my experience to help others. Being open with people has helped others be able to open up to me about their experiences. |
| I think that they should try and get some sex education in the lower grades more so now than when we were in grade school. It is not something that parents like to think about or even know how or who to talk to about this. But it is a good idea to start. |
| I was casually seeing someone who took me taking my clothes off as permission for sex. The result was we had sex when I didn't want to. Because I didn't say no and there was no communication prior to hooking up, I felt confused and did not tell my family for almost a year. |
| In school, a lot of us used to get groped and no action was ever taken. Some of us were too young and did not know how to react or how to get help. |

**APPENDIX C: Charts and Graphs**

CHART 1: Survey Respondents' Sex Education Teachers



**APPENDIX D: Survey Questions**

Survey about Sex Education and Intimate Relationships

Q1.1 Hi, and thank you for taking this survey. My name is Abbie Starker, and I am an undergraduate student at the University of Pennsylvania studying Political Science and Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies. I am currently working on a senior thesis about sex education in the United States, and specifically about how young people learn about intimate relationships. Your response to this survey will help me gain a better understanding of where and how individuals learn about intimate relationships. Your name will not be connected to your survey responses in any way. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at astarker@sas.upenn.edu. This survey should take no more than 20 minutes, and you will be compensated by Qualtrics at standard rates. Thank you again for your time in taking this survey!

TRIGGER WARNING: Many of the questions in this survey are multiple choice questions on topics related to rape, sexual assault, stalking, relationship abuse, and pornography. You will not be required to go into detail about these topics.

By clicking START SURVEY you are verifying that you have read the explanation of the study, and that you agree to participate. You also understand that your participation in this study is strictly voluntary. If at any point, you do not wish to continue completing the survey, you are more than welcome to stop.

❍ START SURVEY

Q2.1 What is your current age?

Q2.2 Please describe your gender identity (feel free to check more than one if applicable).

❑ Woman
❑ Man
❑ Transgender
❑ Genderqueer
❑ Nonbinary
❑ Agender/Neutrois
❑ Genderfluid
❑ _____

Q2.3 Please provide your sex assigned at birth.

❍ Male
❍ Female

Q2.4 Please describe your sexual orientation (feel free to check more than one if applicable).

- ❑ Heterosexual (straight)
- ❑ Gay
- ❑ Lesbian
- ❑ Bisexual
- ❑ Pansexual
- ❑ Asexual
- ❑ Queer
- ❑ _____

Q2.5 Please describe your race/ethnicity (feel free to check more than one if applicable).

- ❑ American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, or other Pacific Islander
- ❑ Asian
- ❑ Black or African American
- ❑ Hispanic
- ❑ Latinx
- ❑ White
- ❑ Multiracial
- ❑ _____

Q2.6 In which state(s) did you attend K-12 school?

- ❑ Alabama
- ❑ Alaska
- ❑ Arizona
- ❑ Arkansas
- ❑ California
- ❑ Colorado
- ❑ Connecticut
- ❑ Delaware
- ❑ District of Columbia
- ❑ Florida
- ❑ Georgia
- ❑ Hawaii
- ❑ Idaho
- ❑ Illinois
- ❑ Indiana
- ❑ Iowa
- ❑ Kansas
- ❑ Kentucky
- ❑ Louisiana
- ❑ Maine
- ❑ Maryland
- ❑ Massachusetts
- ❑ Michigan
- ❑ Minnesota
- ❑ Mississippi
- ❑ Missouri
- ❑ Montana
- ❑ Nebraska
- ❑ Nevada
- ❑ New Hampshire
- ❑ New Jersey
- ❑ New Mexico
- ❑ New York
- ❑ North Carolina
- ❑ North Dakota
- ❑ Ohio
- ❑ Oklahoma
- ❑ Oregon
- ❑ Pennsylvania
- ❑ Puerto Rico
- ❑ Rhode Island
- ❑ South Carolina
- ❑ South Dakota
- ❑ Tennessee
- ❑ Texas

- ❑ Utah
- ❑ Vermont
- ❑ Virginia
- ❑ Washington
- ❑ West Virginia
- ❑ Wisconsin
- ❑ Wyoming
- ❑ I do not reside in the United States

Q2.7 What is the name of the city/town(s) you attended K-12 school?

Q2.8 Which of the following describes your middle school?
- ❍ public
- ❍ private
- ❍ magnet
- ❍ charter
- ❍ religiously affiliated
- ❍ all-boys school
- ❍ all-girls school
- ❍ co-ed school with gender-segregated classrooms
- ❍ Other _____

Q2.9 Which of the following describes your high school?
- ❍ public
- ❍ private
- ❍ magnet
- ❍ charter
- ❍ religiously affiliated
- ❍ all-boys school
- ❍ all-girls school
- ❍ co-ed school with gender-segregated classrooms
- ❍ Other _____

Q2.10 If you attended a school with a religious affiliation, which religion did your school affiliate with? If this does not apply to you, please write "N/A."

Q2.11 Enrollment in a post-secondary institution (post-secondary institutions include colleges, universities, community colleges, junior colleges, and technical/vocational/proprietary schools).
- ❍ I am currently enrolled in a post-secondary institution
- ❍ I have previously been enrolled in a post-secondary institution
- ❍ I have never been enrolled in a post-secondary institution

Q2.12 What is the name of the post-secondary institution that you attend/attended?

Q2.13 Graduation year
- ❍ 2023
- ❍ 2022
- ❍ 2021
- ❍ 2020
- ❍ 2019
- ❍ 2018
- ❍ 2017
- ❍ 2016
- ❍ 2015
- ❍ 2014
- ❍ 2013
- ❍ 2012
- ❍ 2011
- ❍ 2010
- ❍ 2009
- ❍ 2008

Q3.1 The following questions are asked to gain a better understanding of your knowledge of healthy relationships, abusive relationships, rape, and sexual assault.

Q3.2 Rape is caused by an uncontrollable sexual urge.
- ❍ True
- ❍ False
- ❍ Unsure

Q3.3 Rape is caused by an uncontrollable sexual urge.
- ❍ True
- ❍ False
- ❍ Unsure

Q3.3 Most sexual assaults are committed by strangers. It's not rape if the people involved knew each other.
- ❍ True
- ❍ False
- ❍ Unsure

Q3.4 Arguing can be a healthy part of a relationship.
- ❍ True
- ❍ False
- ❍ Unsure

Q3.5 The first thing you should do when someone tells you they have been sexually assaulted/abused is ask them what happened.
- ❍ True
- ❍ False
- ❍ Unsure

Q3.6 If a perpetrator of sexual assault or relationship abuse is under the influence of drugs or alcohol, they are still responsible for their actions.
- ❍ True
- ❍ False
- ❍ Unsure

Q3.7 If someone who has experienced rape, sexual assault, or relationship abuse was under the influenced of drugs or alcohol at the time of this experience, it is partially their fault.
- ❍ True
- ❍ False
- ❍ Unsure

Q3.8 This is an attention filter. Please select the "option 2" below.
- ❍ option 1
- ❍ option 2
- ❍ option 3

Q4.1 Did you learn about sex and/or sex-related topics in a classroom setting in K-12 school? (Note: this type of sex education will be referred to as "formal sex education" for the remainder of this survey)
- ❍ yes
- ❍ no
- ❍ unsure

Q4.2 Which of the following best describes the nature of your formal sex education class in k-12 school?
- ❍ Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Edcuation (AOUME): sometimes called Sexual Risk Avoidance Programs, teach abstinence as the only morally correct option of sexual expression for teenagers. They usually censor information about contraception and condoms for the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and unintended pregnancy.
- ❍ Abstinence-Plus Education: Programs which include information about contraception and condoms in the context of strong abstinence messages.
- ❍ Comprehensive Sex Education: teaches about abstinence as the best method for avoiding STDs and unintended pregnancy, but also teaches about condoms and contraception to reduce the risk of unintended pregnancy and of infection with STDs, including HIV. It also teaches interpersonal and communication skills and helps young people explore their own values, goals, and options.
- ❍ Other. Please Explain. _____

Q4.3 In what grade did you first receive formal sex education?
- ❍ Kindergarten
- ❍ 1st grade
- ❍ 2nd grade
- ❍ 3rd grade
- ❍ 4th grade
- ❍ 5th grade
- ❍ 6th grade
- ❍ 7th grade
- ❍ 8th grade
- ❍ 9th grade
- ❍ 10th grade
- ❍ 11th grade
- ❍ 12th grade
- ❍ Not Sure

Q4.4 In how many grades did you have any amount of formal sex education? (For example, if you had formal sex education in 8th grade for a month and in 12th grade for a month, you would have had formal sex education in 2 grades)
- ❍ 1
- ❍ 2
- ❍ 3
- ❍ 4
- ❍ 5
- ❍ 6
- ❍ 7
- ❍ 8
- ❍ 9
- ❍ 10
- ❍ 11
- ❍ 12
- ❍ 13

Q4.5 Which best describes the teacher(s) who taught your formal sex education class?
- ❑ Teacher who exclusively teaches about topics related to sex
- ❑ General health teacher
- ❑ Gym teacher
- ❑ Sports coach
- ❑ Civics/government/history teacher
- ❑ Nurse
- ❑ Religiously affiliated individual
- ❑ Other _____

Q4.6 The following definitions might be helpful in answering the following questions:
- Sexual Assault: sexual contact or behavior that occurs without explicit consent of the victim. Some forms of sexual assault include: penetration of the victim's body (rape),

attempted rape, forcing a victim to perform sexual acts, such as oral sex or penetrating the perpetrator's body, fondling or unwanted sexual touching

- Rape: In 2012, the Department of Justice updated its definition of rape, "the penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim.
- Abusive Relationship: a pattern of abusive behavior that is used by an intimate partner to gain or maintain power and control over the other intimate partner. It can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This includes any behaviors that intimidate, manipulate, humiliate, isolate, frighten, terrorize, coerce, threaten, blame, hurt, injure, or wound someone.
- Consent: Consent is an affirmative decision to engage in mutually acceptable sexual activity, and is given by clear words or actions. Consent may not be inferred from silence, passivity, or lack of resistance alone, and cannot be obtained from someone who is asleep, unconscious, or otherwise mentally or physically incapacitated, whether due to alcohol, drugs, or some other condition. Consent to one form of sexual activity does not imply consent to other forms of sexual activity and the existence of a current or previous intimate relationship is not sufficient to constitute consent. Consent cannot be obtained by threat, coercion, intimidation, isolation, confinement, or force. Agreement given under such conditions does not constitute consent.

Q4.7 In your formal sex education class, did you discuss the topic of healthy relationships?

- ❍ yes
- ❍ no
- ❍ unsure

Q4.8 How long did you spend discussing healthy relationships?

- ❍ We did not discuss healthy relationships at all
- ❍ less than one full class period
- ❍ one full class period
- ❍ 1-2 class periods
- ❍ 2 or more class periods
- ❍ not sure

Q4.9 In your formal sex education class, did you discuss the topic of abusive relationships?

- ❍ yes
- ❍ no
- ❍ unsure

Q4.10 How long did you spend discussing abusive relationships?

- ❍ We did not discuss abusive relationships at all
- ❍ less than one full class period
- ❍ one full class period
- ❍ 1-2 class periods
- ❍ 2 or more class periods
- ❍ not sure

Q4.11 Did you discuss myths and misconceptions about abusive relationships?
- ❍ yes
- ❍ no
- ❍ unsure

Q4.12 In your formal sex education class, did you discuss the topic of sexual assault and/or rape?
- ❍ yes
- ❍ no
- ❍ unsure

Q4.13 How long did you spend discussing sexual assault and/or rape?
- ❍ We did not discuss sexual assault and/or rape at all
- ❍ less than one full class period
- ❍ one full class period
- ❍ 1-2 class periods
- ❍ 2 or more class periods
- ❍ not sure

Q4.14 Did you discuss myths and misconceptions about sexual assault and/or rape?
- ❍ yes
- ❍ no
- ❍ unsure

Q4.15 Did your formal sex education class acknowledge that there could be people in the class who have experienced sexual assault, rape, stalking, or other forms of intimate partner violence?
- ❍ yes
- ❍ no
- ❍ unsure

Q4.16 Did your formal sex education class explain what resources are available for people who have experienced sexual assault, rape, stalking, or other forms of intimate partner violence?
- ❍ yes
- ❍ no
- ❍ unsure

Q4.17 This is an attention filter. Please type the word "survey" below.

Q4.18 Did you discuss pornography in your sex education class?
- ❍ yes
- ❍ no
- ❍ unsure

Q5.1 Did you ever watch porn before the age of 18?
- ❍ Yes
- ❍ No
- ❍ I do not feel comfortable answering this question
- ❍ Unsure

Q5.2 Have you watched porn since turning 18?
- ❍ Yes
- ❍ No
- ❍ I do not feel comfortable answering this question

Q5.3 Do you currently watch porn?
- ❍ Yes
- ❍ No
- ❍ I do not feel comfortable answering this question

Q5.4 How much does porn influence your perspective on sex and/or healthy relationships?
- ❍ I have never watched pornography
- ❍ Does not/has never influenced
- ❍ Influences somewhat
- ❍ Influences a lot

Q5.5 If you answered that porn influences your perspective on sex and/or healthy relationships somewhat or a lot, please explain with a thoughtful response. If this question does not apply to you, please write "N/A."

Q5.6 Have you ever watched porn that depicted rough sex?
- ❍ yes
- ❍ no
- ❍ I do not feel comfortable answering this question
- ❍ unsure

Q5.7 Have you ever watched porn that depicted non-consensual sex? (please refer to the above definition of consent).
- ❍ yes
- ❍ no
- ❍ I do not feel comfortable answering this question
- ❍ unsure

Q6.1 Where would you say you learned the MOST information about intimate relationships? By dragging the items below, please rank the following sources with 1 being the source that you

learned the MOST and 10 being the source that you learned the LEAST about intimate relationships.
_____ Formal sex education in school
_____ Porn
_____ Movies
_____ Internet searches (excluding porn)
_____ Magazines
_____ Parent(s)
_____ Sibling(s)
_____ Friend(s)
_____ Intimate Partner(s)
_____ Other

Q6.2 Where would you say you learned the MOST RELEVANT information about intimate relationships? By dragging the items below, please rank the following sources with 1 being the source that you learned the MOST RELEVANT information and 10 being the source that you learned the LEAST RELEVANT information about intimate relationships.
_____ Formal sex education in school
_____ Porn
_____ Movies
_____ Internet searches (excluding porn)
_____ Magazines
_____ Parent(s)
_____ Sibling(s)
_____ Friend(s)
_____ Intimate Partner(s)
_____ Other

Q7.1 Have you ever been involved in an intimate relationship? (note: an intimate relationship is an interpersonal relationship that involves physical and/or emotional intimacy).
❍ yes
❍ no

Q7.2 Did your intimate relationship involve any form of sexual activity?
❍ yes
❍ no
❍ I have not been in an intimate relationship

Q7.3 Have you ever been involved in an intimate relationship where you felt like you had LESS power and/or control than your partner?
❍ yes
❍ no
❍ unsure

Q7.4 Have you ever been involved in an intimate relationship where you felt like you had MORE power and/or control than your partner?

- ❍ yes
- ❍ no
- ❍ unsure

Q7.5 Have you ever felt coerced into having sexual intercourse or participating in other sexual activities?

- ❍ yes
- ❍ no
- ❍ I do not feel comfortable answering this question
- ❍ unsure

Q7.6 The following definitions might be helpful in answering the following questions. These are the same definitions that were provided earlier in the survey:

- Sexual Assault: sexual contact or behavior that occurs without explicit consent of the victim. Some forms of sexual assault include: penetration of the victim's body (rape), attempted rape, forcing a victim to perform sexual acts, such as oral sex or penetrating the perpetrator's body, fondling or unwanted sexual touching
- Rape: In 2012, the Department of Justice updated its definition of rape, "the penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim.
- Abusive Relationship: a pattern of abusive behavior that is used by an intimate partner to gain or maintain power and control over the other intimate partner. It can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This includes any behaviors that intimidate, manipulate, humiliate, isolate, frighten, terrorize, coerce, threaten, blame, hurt, injure, or wound someone. Consent: Consent is an affirmative decision to engage in mutually acceptable sexual activity, and is given by clear words or actions.
- Consent may not be inferred from silence, passivity, or lack of resistance alone, and cannot be obtained from someone who is asleep, unconscious, or otherwise mentally or physically incapacitated, whether due to alcohol, drugs, or some other condition. Consent to one form of sexual activity does not imply consent to other forms of sexual activity and the existence of a current or previous intimate relationship is not sufficient to constitute consent. Consent cannot be obtained by threat, coercion, intimidation, isolation, confinement, or force. Agreement given under such conditions does not constitute consent.

Q7.7 Have you personally experienced rape, sexual assault, stalking, and/or relationship abuse (including sexual abuse, physical abuse, economic abuse, and/or emotional abuse)?

- ❍ yes
- ❍ no
- ❍ I do not feel comfortable answering this question
- ❍ unsure

Q7.8 If you have personally experienced rape, sexual assault, stalking, and/or relationship abuse, did the sex education you received in school help you to understand and/or cope with this experience?

- ❍ yes
- ❍ somewhat
- ❍ no
- ❍ unsure
- ❍ I have not personally experienced rape, sexual assault, stalking, or relationship abuse

Q7.9 If you have personally experienced rape, sexual assault, stalking, and/or relationship abuse, did you experience this before the age of 18?

- ❍ yes
- ❍ no
- ❍ I do not feel comfortable answering this question
- ❍ I have not personally experienced rape, sexual assault, stalking, or relationship abuse

Q7.10 If you have personally experienced rape, sexual assault, stalking, and/or relationship abuse, did you report this incident to the police or another authority?

- ❍ yes
- ❍ no
- ❍ I do not feel comfortable answering this question
- ❍ I have not personally experienced rape, sexual assault, stalking, or relationship abuse

Q7.11 If you answered yes or no to the above question, please explain with a thoughtful response. If this does not apply to you, please write "N/A."

Q7.12 Has someone you know experienced rape, sexual assault, stalking, and/or relationship abuse (including sexual abuse, physical abuse, economic abuse, and/or emotional abuse)?

- ❍ yes
- ❍ no
- ❍ unsure
- ❍ I do not feel comfortable answering this question

Q7.13 If someone you know has experienced rape, sexual assault, stalking, and/or relationship abuse, did the sex education you received in school help you understand how to speak to this person about their experience?

- ❍ Yes
- ❍ Somewhat
- ❍ No
- ❍ Not sure
- ❍ I do not know anyone who has experienced rape, sexual assault, stalking, or relationship abuse

Q7.14 If someone you know has experienced rape, sexual assault, stalking, and/or relationship abuse, did the sex education you received in school help you understand how to help this person?

- ❍ yes
- ❍ somewhat
- ❍ no
- ❍ not sure
- ❍ I do not know anyone who has experienced rape, sexual assault, stalking, or relationship abuse

Q8.1 Is there any other relevant information that you would like to share? Please write a thoughtful answer below.

Q8.2 Do you have a personal anecdote that you'd like to share related to the topics in this survey? If so, please write it in detail below.

Q8.3 If you are willing to speak more in depth about the topics mentioned in this survey, please enter your email address below. (Note: this conversation can be anonymous, and you will have the ability to choose which topics you feel comfortable talking about. You are not required to provide your email address.)